

SHEIKH NOOR-UD-DIN WALI

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali

(Nund Rishi)

G.N. GAUHAR



Sahitya Akademi

Sahitya Akademi

Rabindra Bhavan, 35, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi 110 001

Block V-B, Rabindra Sarobar Stadium, Calcutta 700 029

29, Eldams Road, Teynampet, Madras 600 018

172, Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg, Dadar, Bombay 400 014

© Sahitya Akademi

First Published 1988

SAHITYA AKADEMI

REVISED PRICE Rs. 15-00

Published by the Sahitya Akademi
and printed at Bharti Printers, Delhi 110 032

To
My Respected Father
Haji Mohammad Akram Muquiem

Contents

1. Introduction	7
2. Sources	10
3. Life-Sketch	16
4. Reshout (Reshc-ism)	43
5. Intrigues	49
6. Epithets	57
7. Disciples	63
8. A National Hero	69
9. The Poet 'Nund'	73

Introduction

Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali, Alamdari-Kashmir (The Standard Bearer of Kashmir), commonly known as Nund (Pious) Rishi, is considered as the living symbol of Kashmir and the guiding light for its people. As a saint, revolutionary, patriot and poet, he has exerted enormous influence on the beliefs and mental thinking of the people of the Happy Valley. His thoughts have moulded the minds of generations for more than five centuries, establishing a culture of utmost religious tolerance with an abiding faith in the omnipresence of God.

Kashmir has produced a galaxy of towering personalities but hardly any other luminary is so eminently multidimensional as Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali. His greatness has been widely acknowledged right from his own days.

The greatest daughter of Vitasta, Lal Ded, had named the Sheikh her spiritual heir. The benevolent King Bud-Shah (Sultan Zainulabidin: 1420-1470), was among the pallbearers in the huge procession of mourners when Nund Rishi passed away in 1438. A deeply revered saint of the sixteenth century, Sheikh Makhdoom Hamza, used to go Tsar¹ off and on to pay homage at his shrine. It is said that the saint would walk the entire distance of 35 km from his abode in Srinagar, making half the journey bare-footed.

Mirza Haider Daughlat (1499-1551), a cousin of Babur, ruled Kashmir for a brief period only by relying heavily on the popularity of this saint. The same practice was later repeated by Emperor Akbar who allotted big endowments to the Reshi headquarter at Tsar by way of tribute. This enabled him to derive political benefit of considerable consequence. Sukh Jeevan Mal (1756-1769), a governor during the Pathan rule briefly

¹'Ts' used to convey sound as in 'Tsar' of Russia.

seceded from the central authority and nominated a distinguished Persian scholar and poet to write an exhaustive versified history of the Reshi movement and the biography of its leader. Another governor of Kabul, Atta Mohammad Khan, who declared independence of Kashmir in 1809, struck gold and silver coins in the name of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din to popularise his rule.

Immediately after the death of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din, people took keen interest in the development of his burial place and raised befitting memorials at various places where he had spent some time. A shrine and *khangah* were built at Tsrar by the people under the management of Sultan Zainulabidin. Later, Sultan Ali Shah Chak (1570-78) got a verandah (colonade) of engraved wooden pillars constructed around the shrine. In the early nineteenth century the Pathan ruler, Atta Mohammad Khan, reconstructed the *khangah* and the tomb but owing to his defeat at the hands of Wazir Fateh Mohammad Khan could not complete it. In 1951, the Deputy Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, took up this incomplete task and got the shrine complex renovated. In 1964 its management was taken over by Sheikh Abdullah as President of the Auqaf Trust. At other places like Draigam, Kaimoh and Tsimar memorials were raised by the people and these have been renovated and reconstructed several times.

During the Sheikh's own life time eminent missionaries like Shah Hamdan Amiri-Kabir Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (1341-1385), Mir Mohammad Hamdani (1372-1450), and Syed Hussain Simnani (d. 1421) all developed contacts with him. There were many eminent local saints and sadhus too, who joined the galaxy of his disciples with pride and pleasure. Even some foreign Syed saints became his followers.

As the patron-saint of this region, Sheikh Noor-ud-Din provided the guiding light to the seekers of Absolute Truth; as a popular mass leader, he made non-violence and religious tolerance the basic characteristics of our national thinking, and as an able organiser, he built cadres of his organisation in every part of Kashmir. He provided a new dimension to our cultural traditions at a critical juncture when they faced suffocation. He proved a saviour of Kashmiri language at a time when Persian posed a potential threat to its very existence.

Thousands of pilgrims pay homage daily at his main shrine

at Tsrari-Sharief and at other memorials dotting the whole valley. His annual Urs (death anniversary) is celebrated as a day of reverence by the masses who derive inspiration from his teachings. On Thursdays, special gatherings are held at his tomb and thus "Tsrara Breswar" (Thursday of Tsrari-Sharief) has become a theme of our folk literature. During 1972-73 "Sali-e-Alamdari" (Sheikh's year) was celebrated with great devotion, fervour and reverence by the people of Kashmir at the call of the Kashmir Cultural Organisation.¹ In 1977 the state government constituted a broad-based sixth birth centenary committee² which organised various programmes in memory of the saint-poet. Radio Kashmir introduced a special weekly programme under the title of "Alamdari Kashmir" for a full year. The National Academy of Letters (Sahitya Akademi), New Delhi, organised a National Seminar in 1978.

In spite of the fact that the Sheikh has created history as a benevolent leader of the masses, he himself appears to be a hero of legends. Strangely enough, a historical reality has been lulled in the mysterious lap of legend. It has become an uphill task for researchers to sift the facts from fiction. The need of the hour is to edit his biography as to make it authentic and credible.

Unfortunately contemporary material about his life has disappeared in intriguing circumstances and a good number of the biographies and anthologies written or edited two centuries after his death provide us only confusing data and twisted tales. The facts have merged with the mist of digressions and anecdotes bordering on miracles and supernatural narrations.

It will not be possible to give in this book an exhaustive, befitting and detailed account of the various facets connected with his life or the material gathered from numerous narratives contained in various biographies and anthologies. However, it has been endeavoured to highlight some other dimensions of his personality which have hitherto remained eclipsed by his dominant stature as a saint.

¹A registered representative literary body of Kashmiri writers was established in 1972. The author has been thrice elected its president.

²Vide SRO No. 1224 GD dated 3.11.77, the J & K government constituted the said committee. Sheikh Abdullah was its chief patron and the author its chairman.

2

Sources

Though volumes have been written about Sheikh Noor-ud-Din's life and teachings no authentic biography of the Saint is available. This is because unfortunately, the earliest record is not available and the later evidence is so distorted that the saint is made to appear, more or less, as a superman.

The chroniclers of the 14th and 15th centuries have narrated only the achievements of kings and some facts relating to life in the royal courts. In the process they have omitted events of far-reaching importance not otherwise connected with royal affairs. However, Jona Raja a historian of Sultan Zainulabidin (1430-70) has in his *Zaina Rajatarangini*, a Sanskrit chronicle, mentioned in most precise words that one Mulla Noor-ud-Din was arrested and detained during the reign of Sultan Ali Shah (1413-1419). Conflicting views have been put forth in this regard. But there is no doubt that it relates to Sheikh Noor-ud-Din.

Mulla Ahmad Kashmiri, a minister in the court of Sultan Zainulabidin, was a great scholar of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit. His "Wiqā Kashmir" is an important document about the happenings of the 14th and 15th centuries, but unfortunately it is not traceable. Later, a historian of the 19th century, Pir Ghulam Hassan Khoihami, claims to have benefited from this source material but the incident he has narrated about its mysterious disappearance from his possession makes his claim debatable if not doubtful.

In 1577 during the reign of Sultan Yusuf Shah Chak, Sayyid Ali wrote a history of Kashmir in Persian. He claims to have greatly benefited from two sources close to the Sheikh era, viz. *A History of Quazi Ibrahim* and *An Anthology of Kashmiri Saints* written by Haji Baba Adhami. Both these sources are not available now nor has Sayyid Ali used much material from them.

He has only cared to describe the status and stature of the Sheikh in the light of the records contained in these sources.

The author of *Gauhari Aalam*, Badi-ud-Din Abdul Quassim, (18th century) states that while collating and collecting material for his history he consulted an autograph manuscript of *Miratual Awliya* (Mirror of Saints) by Mulla Ahmad Kashmiri and benefited from this source for writing the chapter relating to Pandavas. The said manuscript was then lying in the royal library of Oudh. It contained the Persian translation and commentary of Sheikh's poetry originally compiled and edited under the title of *Noor Nama* during his own lifetime. It is also evident that *Miratual Awliya* was not only a translation but an exhaustive commentary of his verse. It is evident from this reference that *Miratual Awliya* has immense and primary value for the students of Kashmiri literature. But unfortunately no attempt has been made to resurrect it. Equally important are *Wiqā Kashmir* by the same author, *History of Kashmir* by Quazi Ibrahim and *An Anthology of Kashmiri Saints* by Baba Adhami.

Kati Pandit (later Baba Qutub-ud-Din) was an outstanding Sanskrit scholar who used to scribe the Sheikh's verses in the Sharda script immediately they were composed. This important document, too, is not available nor has its extracts found place in later records. All the later histories and anthologies were written and edited by Persian scholars who did not know the Sharda script, so they could not consult this important document which remained buried in the debris of forgetfulness.

In the absence of the earliest record about our subject we are forced to base our information upon the anthologies written during or after the sixteenth century, other scattered data contained in various histories written during the later Chak period or thereafter, and the common but strong traditions which have become an inseparable part of our history. These sources broadly consist of the following:

(1) *Reshi Nama Lamiya* by Dawood Khaki (1521-1585). In this Persian panegyric (*qasida*) the poet gives the life story of his contemporary Reshi saint, Baba Hardi Reshi of Islamabad. It also contains references to the Reshi movement and some

information about its leader, Sheikh Noor-ud-Din in it. However, it does not contain any useful information material about the life and mission of the Sheikh.

(2) *Noor Nama* by Nasib Gazi. Nasib Sahib was an illustrious disciple of Dawood Khaki. Though he was not connected with the Reshi cult, nevertheless he remained a strict vegetarian all his life. He was an outstanding scholar of Persian language, theology and mysticism and had made a keen study of Kashmir's history and literature. In his *Tazkire Mashaikh Kashmir* (Anthology of Kashmiri Saints) he has dwelt on the Reshi order and the purpose of its mission and given life-sketches of eminent Reshis of Kashmir, including saints of other mystic orders. However his *Noor Nama*, written in 1630, is an exclusive work on the Sheikh.

The learned author has mainly been concerned with the mystic aspect of the saint's life. The historical facts about his life and mission can hardly be sifted from the mystic anecdotes narrated in it. The author has not quoted many verses but has instead confined himself to their gist in Persian.

In spite of all these shortcomings, *Noor Nama* is the main source about the saint and his associates. It relates some thought-provoking facts about the bulk, rich content and popularity of his verse. However the facts need to be sifted from the chaff of digression with much skill and scrutiny.

(3) *Asrarul-Abrar* by Dawood Mishkati, the revered disciple of Baba Nasib, was written in 1653. It is in ornate Persian and provides valuable information both about the Reshi order and the life of its leader. While he takes a stand different from his teacher, he fails to make any special mention of the sources and their value. In these circumstances this book only adds to the confusion. Nevertheless it provides us material about the eminence of the saint and his contribution to Kashmiri language and literature.

(4) During the Pathan rule Raja Sukhjeevan Mal (1756-1764), adviser to the Afghan governor, succeeded in liberating Kashmir from the centre and in order to restore the people's self-confidence and sense of valour, assigned the task of versifying the glorious history of Kashmir to five great Persian poets. He directed them to write in epic form and in the pattern and style of Firdausi's *Shahnama* a versified history of Kashmir. Of these

poets Mulla Abdul Wahab Shaiq was assigned the portion relating to the origin and evolution of the Reshi movement with special reference to the life and achievements of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. Shaiq completed the task in 1764. Within a compass of seven thousand verses he narrated the history of the Reshi movement, the life story of its leader and the achievements of his successors. This work is greatly based on the prose work of Baba Gazi.

(5) In 1766 another great Persian poet Bahauallah, was born in Srinagar. He was an eminent scholar of Persian literature, mysticism and history. He composed, on the pattern of Poet Nizami Ganjvi, five *masnavis* in Persian called "Khamsa". One among this series is "Reshi Nama Rohafza". This long poem comprising more than five thousand verses also provides us some information of the Sheikh's life, but the bulk of it deals with his miracles and supernatural acts.

(6) In the later decades of the 18th century, a great scholar, researcher and poet, Baba Mohammad Kamal of Tsrari-Sharief, wrote *Reshi Nama Ambar Shimama* in Persian prose. In this huge volume the author has, for the first time, recorded the bulk of the Sheikh's original verses. He has further given the background to each couplet and poem. The book is of immense value to students of history and literature. However, the author by attributing some or the other background to various verses of the Sheikh, has narrowed the scope of their symbolic and metaphorical ambit. It has thus limited the universality and the eternal character of his poetry. These anecdotes narrated as background to the verses of the Sheikh were mingled with the real historical facts. Again this author does not quote his sources with specification. He, however, states that he got ample benefit from the rare manuscripts to which he got access in different parts of the state, and from traditional accounts which were available then.

In close succession to his prose work, Baba Kamal composed *Noor Nama* in Persian poetry in the *Masnawi* form. This book consists of several thousand verses and its language is simple, chaste and lucid. While it makes no addition to what is contained in his prose work, it no doubt provides us with a simple translation of certain poems and couplets of the Sheikh.

(7) *Rauztur Riaz*, another scholarly work, was written by

Baba Mohammad Khalil of Tsrari-Sharief in Persian in 1840. This volume of more than five hundred pages is based more or less on the same material. It has, however, projected some new dimensions of the Sheikh's poetic acumen. Its style is ornate and language full of verbosity. Moreover his versified translation is more accurate and very faithful to the original. It helps us to decipher the verses which had been recorded in a most defective and incomplete script. However, the work is most remarkable owing to the fact that it contains a good number of Persian *ghazals* and *nazms* composed by Baba Khalil in praise of the Sheikh.

(8) As earlier stated the Persian histories written during the lifetime of the Sheikh or immediately after his death contained ample information about the saint. Unfortunately none of them is extant.

Syyed Ali's *Tareekhi Kashmir* (1579), *Baharistan Shahi* written in 1614, the history book by Malik Hailder of Tsoder (1620), Khawaja Azam Dedamari's *Wagaati Kashmir* (1747), Narain Kaul Aajiz's *Tareekh Kashmir* and the history written by Pir Hassan Shah of Khoihama (d. 1898) are all written in Persian and contain full descriptions about the saint-poet. But these authors have either followed the views of Baba Nasib or of his disciple, Baba Mishkati.

In the early part of the 20th century, G.M. Din Sofi took great pains to collect and write a history of Kashmir, entitled *Kasheer*, in two volumes in English. In this book the learned author for the first time introduced the Sheikh and his works to the English-knowing people. Close on its heel came another monumental work, by another historian P.N.K. Bamzai, which also gives detailed account of the Sheikh. In 1944-45 an outstanding Kashmiri poet and critic, late Abdul Ahad Azad (d. 1948), wrote a literary history of Kashmir in three volumes in which he has made a detailed survey of the Sheikh's life and work.

(9) An important touchstone for proper examination and critical sifting of facts about the Sheikh's life and mission is provided by the internal evidence contained in his own verses. His poetry unfolds the surroundings and environment in which the saint-poet lived. Many of his verses even provide us with sufficient information about his life.

(10) Lastly, there is a document reportedly executed by

Syed Mir Mohammad Hamdani in 1408. Though it bears no title, some people have termed it as *Khati Irshad* (Letter of Authority). This document is reported to have been authenticated by the Sultan himself. So its value cannot be under-estimated. There are more than two views about the authenticity and relevance of this deed. In spite of all the conflicting views the document is one of the indispensable sources to assess the eminence of the Sheikh and his impact on the people during his lifetime.

On the basis of all these sources the material collected has been cross-checked, critically sifted and logically assessed. The acceptable versions have been retained. Acceptance and rejection cannot be made by a summary treatment of facts but requires a full-dressed discussion which is not the ambit of the present series.

With a linking cohesion have been arrayed certain scattered facts and this chain of facts has naturally become the basis for some inferences, deductions and conclusions. It is not claimed that the conclusions drawn here can become a substitute for the contemporary and authentic history but they are so deeply rooted in the soil of existing material that only the contemporary record, if and when available, may prove or disprove all or any of these conclusions. If the original record, whenever it is traced, corroborates only a few of these inferences, it would amount to an achievement for this book.

If these discussions only create a genuine urge and desire among the research scholars to trace out the contemporary material about the Sheikh, it would be considered a great success for this monograph and thus it shall serve a historical purpose.

Life-Sketch

The ancestors of Sheikh Noor-ud-Din hailed from Kishtwar originally which was a tiny independent kingdom but was later annexed by the Dogra ruler Maharaja Gulab Singh (1846-1857) with the State of Jammu and Kashmir. It now forms a sub-division within the district of Doda in Jammu Province. The forefathers of the Sheikh were Rajputs who owned an estate in the independent kingdom of Kishtwar. Ogra Teg, the great-grandfather of the Sheikh, was defeated in a local feud and he, along with his family and brothers, fled to Kashmir during the reign of Ramadeva (1252-73). There he took refuge in the court of Khumni Wano, owner of the estate of Tilsara¹. His brother took refuge in another smaller principality at Duderkot². By dint of their ability and valour, both the brothers rose to the high position of garrison commanders at Tilsara and Duderkot respectively. However, after the defeat of the successor of Khumni Wano, Ogra Teg along with his family migrated to another tiny estate of Gud Satho³ where the Sheikh's father Salar-sanz was forced by circumstances to take to wandering.

Meanwhile at Duderkot in a local battle in which the Raja was killed, the family of the great-grandson of Ogra Teg's brother was also killed. Only an infant girl escaped death by accident. At the moment when the marauders struck, she happened to be in the custody of her foster mother, wife of the local *chowkidar*. The *chowkidar* and his wife brought up the child as their own but concealed her parentage to save her from the wrath of the aggressors. The name of the girl was Sadra (ocean).

¹ A village in Tsadora tehsil of Badgam district.

² A village in Anantnag district.

³ A village in Tsadora tehsil.

The *chowkidar* migrated to Khaijogipora village where he took up a job as night watchman. The girl, still a minor, was engaged to a young widower, who was father of two children. But the marriage was not consummated. Before the bride could go to the house of her husband, the latter died. The pious *chowkidar* took pity on the orphaned children and brought them to his own house to be brought up there.

The *chowkidar* took Sadra to the missionary saint Syed Hussain Simnani of Kulgam and narrated to him the plight of the girl. The Syed assured both the ward and the guardian of a bright future but warned the *chowkidar* against getting the girl married without first informing him.

Salar Sanz, a descendant of Ogra Teg, who was banished from Gud Satho, kept wandering for quite some time and finally reached the meditation place of a local saint, Yasman Reshi. Salar became a disciple of the Reshi. He embraced Islam and was renamed Salar-ud-Din. Meanwhile, the *chowkidar* also died and the hapless woman, Sadra, went to seek the blessings of Yasman Reshi. On his intervention Sadra was introduced to Salar-ud-Din and both came to know of their common origin. The saint got them married and thereafter they lived in the house of the *chowkidar* in Khaijogipora village.

The families were known both at Tilsara and Duderkot as "Sanz" which according to some scholars is a distorted Kashmiri version of the word "Sen". As the Sen dynasty ruled Kishtwar for some time, these scholars tend to connect the Sanz family, ancestors of the Sheikh, with the same dynasty. This view is, however, erroneous inasmuch as Sanz is a purely Kashmiri word which stands for the keepers of fortresses.

In the second volume of his *History of Kashmir*, Pir Hassan Shah writes:

During the balkanisation, the village or estate owners ruled particular areas and separated their respective estates by constructing forts. Such places where these forts were constructed are named in a manner as to suffix the word 'Kot' with the name, e.g. Zainakot, Duderkot, etc. The officer in charge of the fort was called Sanz.

It is thus clear that the forefathers of the Sheikh, on both

paternal and maternal sides, were appointed as keepers of forts both at Tilsara and Dunderkot. It was because of this background that the families were called Sanz. The poet himself says: "Both my father and mother are from Sanz stock." The span of the married life of this couple was brief. His father died soon after he was born. Sheikh Noor-ud-Din was the only child of Sadra and Salar.

The Sheikh was born at Khai village in Kulgam tehsil where his parents had settled. Though local tradition indicates his birthplace as Kaimoh, a village adjacent to Khai, his own verses negate this tradition. He says: "There in Khai village I took birth." The tradition however, too is not unfounded. The Sheikh spent his childhood and youth at Kaimoh and retired from active life while still in that village. His parents, wife and children are all buried there, and above all he has in his verses recorded Kaimoh as the place of his residence. Thus it is evident that after giving birth to the Sheikh, his family migrated to that place from Khai. It is also clear from the record that the Sheikh had cultivated the land of the Lambardar of Khai village from which he made a fortune. It seems that the family migrated permanently to Kaimoh but the Sheikh used to go to Khai for his professional pursuits.

There is considerable disagreement among local historians regarding the exact date of birth of the Sheikh. Baba Mishkati has taken a view different from that of his esteemed teacher, Nasib Ghazi about it. Both of them have not quoted any source. Nasib gives his year of birth as 1377 whereas his pupil states that the Sheikh was born in 1355. Later anthologists and historians followed more or less either Nasib Ghazi or his disciple. Nineteenth century historian Pir Hassan subscribed to the view taken by Mishkati. He has lent credence to his view by the claim that he benefited from a contemporary history of the Sheikh, viz. *Wiqā Kashmir* by Mulla Ahmad. The circumstances in which Hassan claims to have lost that rare manuscript immediately after he had studied it, reduces the credibility of his assertion. Even if we believe his statement, it is still difficult to infer that he had foreseen the disappearance of that manuscript and kept notes of all important dates, etc. with him. There is no reason to take a different view from the earliest one taken by Nasib Ghazi. Confusion is further added

by the inscriptions on the grave of the saint, but it will make this book too lengthy if we take notice of all these circumstances. By giving preference to earlier record it is, therefore, agreed that the Sheikh was born in Khai village in A.D. 1377.

Some anecdotes are connected with his birth and the post-birth-period. It is stated that the Sanz couple after their marriage were eager to have a son. Salar-ud-Din, while performing the duties of *chowkidar* in Khai village on the full-moon night, reached the outskirts of the village and halted for a while near the hut of a sadhu. Besides being an astronomer the sadhu was a mature spiritualist. At the dead of night Salar overheard the sadhu telling his wife that a bouquet of roses would rise from the spring of Khaijogipora that very night just before dawn and any lucky woman who inhaled the fragrance of those roses would give birth to a great Saint of the Universe. The roses would disappear within a moment leaving place for the emergence of a bunch of lilies. Any woman who would pluck the lilies and inhale their fragrance was also destined to become the mother of a saint, though of lower status.

Salar-ud-Din ran back home and narrated the incident to his wife. Both of them rushed to the spring and on arrival there found a bunch of roses emerging from its pure and milky water. Sadra plucked the bouquet and inhaled its fragrance. While returning towards their home they found the sadhu and his wife going in the direction of the spring. The yogi could gather from the facial expression of Sadra that she was under the spell of divine fragrance.

It is reported that after nine months Sadra gave birth to a son on the 10th of Zilhaj (Idi-Qurban Day) in A.D. 1377 in the same village.

It is further stated that after his birth the infant did not suckle the breasts of his mother for three days causing great anxiety to the parents. By the evening of the third day Lal Ded, the great Yogini and outstanding poetess, reached the house of Sadra, took the baby in her lap and, placing him close to her chest, whispered these words into his ears:

Thou hast not felt shy of taking birth;

Why dost thou feel shy of tasting the pleasures of the world?

Then she made the baby suck her squeezed breasts and thus the infant tasted the first pleasure of the world under the guidance of a matured mystic. A later-day Kashmiri poet has summed up the incident thus:

Oh thee, the full moon of the universe,
 immediately after thy birth, Lala Arifa
 did adorn in her lap a cradle for thee.
 She made you drink the nectar of life.
 Bravo! My Lord, Oh generous Noor-ud-Din.

After the baby felt satisfied Lal Ded returned him to his mother Sadra with this caution: "Let thee take care of my spiritual heir."

It is further said that the name of Noor-ud-Din was given by Syed Hussain Simnani to this new-born child whom his parents, out of love, called Nund (the pious one). Later the Sheikh used the same word "Nund" or "Nund Rishi of Kaimoh" as his pen-name.

Little is known about Noor-ud-Din's childhood but it is evident that he was more intelligent than other children of his age and therefore his achievements were ascribed mainly to his spiritual powers. Neither historians nor anthologists cared to know about his youth. They were mostly concerned with his miraculous deeds and so collected and recorded only such incidents and anecdotes which were relevant to their subject. They have not tried to know the Sheikh as a human being. However, some facts which are contained in his own verses about his early life and which are deep in tradition do shed light on the hidden aspects of his childhood and youth.

The mother took the child Nund to a village *muktab* where the teacher at the start taught him "Alif" and "Bay", the first two letters of the Arabic alphabet. The pupil happily repeated the "Alif" but did not repeat the second letter. The teacher rebuked Nund who in reply explained: "Sir, Alif is Allah, who is one and omnipresent. Bay creates duality." The teacher was annoyed with the boy and expelled him from his institution.

The disappointed mother then took him to a weaving centre to work as an apprentice. The keen boy remained with the new teacher studying the profession minutely and found that while playing with the shuttle upon the loom, the weaving master used to cut the thread with his teeth and would swallow the severed thread pieces. The young apprentice warned the teacher that the latter was committing an act of misappropriation with the property entrusted to him. The master felt ashamed but instead of benefiting from the company of such an intelligent boy, he called his mother and asked her to take him away as "he is an ascetic and cannot pick up worldly professions." The frustrated mother took her son back home and requested her stepsons Shash and Gundro to train him as a night watchman. Both of them, after the death of Salar-ud-Din, had been appointed as village *chowkidars*.

The two step-brothers of Nund, instead of training him tried to make him a spoiled child and later on goaded him to commit thefts. It is stated that one night they stole a cow. Nund was assigned the task of taking the animal home but he left it midway and went home. The following night the brothers, annoyed as they were with Nund, took him to a house and, after breaking into it, made the young Nund enter a room and directed him to steal costly things. The boy, finding the children of this poor family shivering in cold, wrapped them with his own blanket and left the house empty-handed. On the third night he was again taken by Shash and Gundro to another house with the purpose of committing burglary. Dogs outside the house were barking loudly. Nund impromptu composed a long poem with the refrain, "Hoon chhoi dapan wov-wov."¹ (The barking dog is saying 'sow sow').

Perhaps this story is also the outcome of the confusion created by later commentators who have invented one or the other background for each poem of the Sheikh and so to connect this poem with some background they devised this anecdote. The poem is so mature both in theme and art that no discerning mind can accept that such a masterpiece could be a spontaneous composition of a small child, that too in a frust-

¹'Wov' is the sound of the barking dog. In Kashmiri the word means 'to sow'.

rating and confusing situation when his companions were committing house trespass during the night. However, this whole episode is either a link in the chain of machinations to malign the Sheikh or a conspiracy by Shash and Gundro to spoil his career. It is difficult to believe that a mother like Sadra could have tolerated even the association of her son with undesirable people. Had she even known that her stepsons were dabbling in any objectionable profession, she would never have allowed her son to mix with them. It must also be borne in mind that her stepsons were living separately as is inferred from a verse of the Sheikh.

It will be seen later that intrigues were made against the Sheikh and a campaign of vilification was also launched against him. In these circumstances it can be safely said that these anecdotes are part of the same campaign. The intriguers failed to cause harm to the Sheikh during his lifetime and so their successors perpetuated this process and forged a history full with malice.

It has been seen that Sadra was more than aware that her child was blessed with extraordinary attributes. She would never have allowed him to fall in bad company. She was conscious that the child, who was conceived after she had inhaled the fragrance of the miraculous rose bunch, was destined to become a leading saint. She had also learnt from the great missionary saint, scholar and leader, Syed Ali Hamdani (who had visited her hut to see the six-year old child) that Nund was an extraordinary boy. The great Yogini Lal Ded had appointed him as her 'spiritual heir'. Syed Hussain Simnani whom Syed Ali had assigned the duty of guiding the boy usually took him to his centre at Kulgam. Sadra was herself a devoted disciple of Syed Simnani. Again, she was a pious lady who regularly offered prayers and often visited the centre of Simnani to seek his blessings and guidance. She was also worldly wise who, in spite of her poverty made constant attempts to get her son educated. In all these circumstances it will be unfair to connect her with the alleged nefarious activities of her stepsons Shash and Gundro.

It has already been stated that Syed Ali Hamdani had entrusted Syed Simnani with the care of Noor-ud-Din and that Sadra was also a disciple of Syed Simnani. So Simnani must have had close connections and contacts with the Sheikh. It is

also clear that this association was of mutual benefit and understanding. Baba Nasib, while describing their intimacy, records that Simnani was so fond of Sheikh's verses that in case the latter failed to visit him during the day to recite his poems, the former would himself cross the river Veshu to reach the home of Noor-ud-Din. It is clear from this factual narration that the Sheikh was composing verses from an early age, and a circle of the admirers of his art existed even much before he retired from social life.

This association had brought the two mentally and spiritually closer to each other. Thus Syed Simnani can be considered as the first friend, guide and teacher of the Sheikh.

During the reigns of Sultan Shihab-ud-Din and his younger brother, Sultan Qutb-ud-Din, the famous Central Asian missionary, saint, scholar and poet, Syed Ali Hamdani, paid three visits to Kashmir. He not only revolutionised the religious life of the Kashmiris but influenced every walk of their life, changed the course of history and founded a new cultural concept in Kashmir. He paid his second visit in A.D. 1379 when the Sheikh was hardly two years old. At the time of his third and last visit in A.D. 1383 the age of the Sheikh was only six years. There are sufficient, convincing reasons to believe that a meeting between the two took place and the Amir imparted initial training to the Sheikh. The reasons in support of this contention will be discussed later.

As a young man the Sheikh had cultivated quite a big landed estate of the Lambardar of Khai. By dint of his hard labour, sincerity and honesty the tiller Sheikh raised a huge harvest which not only perplexed the landlord but even other villagers. They attributed this not to his hard work but to his supernatural powers. The fields which were cultivated by the Sheikh are specifically identified even today. The names of these fields are "Naga Neir", "Mageh Theer" and "Baga Baren".

After he had improved his economic position and acquired high social status the Sheikh was engaged at the age of fifteen to a girl belonging to a zamindar family of Dada Sara Tral village in Anantnag district. The following year the formal betrothal took place and the marriage was consummated after four years when he was twenty. All these facts are derived

from a poem of the Sheikh which opens with the verse:

Zas te darow gur ham manzlo'
(On my birth carved wooden cradles were decorated
for me).

The name of his wife was Zai which is an abbreviated form of either "Zaitoon" or "Zubeda". Akbar Din was his father-in-law. The family wielded considerable political influence.

It is strange that his biographers have left an impression that the Sheikh was just an idle man without any profession or vocation. They have attributed every act of his to his supernatural powers. However, they have lost sight of important facts. No mother, especially a conscientious woman like Sadra, would get her unskilled and unemployed son married. Even if motherly love overlooked these niceties, no family of recognition (as the in-laws of the Sheikh were) would have tied the destiny of their lovely daughter with an unemployed youth who had no economic base or family assets. In these circumstances, the attraction for Akbar Din was the calibre and hard work of the Sheikh which motivated him to send his daughter to a far-off place.

In spite of the hard labour he had to put in as an agricultural worker, he did not give up spiritual meditation and gnostic practices. It is established from the writings of Baba Nasib that the Sheikh used to spend long hours with Syed Simnani.

During this period he would every day retire to the outskirts of his village to meditate in loneliness for quite some time. That elevated place was even during his lifetime named as "Fikri Taing" (Mound for meditation).

From the contents of the conversation which later on took place between the Sheikh and his mother in a cave it is manifest that the latter had full confidence in her son and hoped that he would reconsolidate the shattered position of the Sanz dynasty.

From Zai, the Sheikh had three children—two sons and a daughter. However, none of them survived. One of the sons

¹This poem further indicates that the Sheikh had taken birth in a well to-do-family.

died during infancy whereas his daughter Zoon and second son Haider died later in the cave.

There is no direct or indirect evidence to suggest that the Sheikh had approached any other saint or scholar during his lifetime except Syed Simnani. We do not also know whether Lal Ded ever again met the Sheikh after the incident which had taken place on the third day of his birth. Many great Muslim saints, scholars and missionaries came to see him and even Hindu mystics and Brahmins visited him. Mir Mohammad Hamdani, another dignitary, also met the Sheikh at the climax of the latter's popularity (this will be discussed in detail at the appropriate place).

Once he did not return home for a few days causing great anxiety both to his family and the villagers. They looked for him in the adjoining forest but could not find him. After some days a villager tending his cattle found one of his flock missing and reached a thick jungle in search of it. He came by a cave, deep and dark. Peeping inside, he found Nund and rushed back to inform the village folks.

The Sheikh had got the cave dug out before entering it. This indicates that either he was economically so well-off as to engage a large number of labourers to dig a deep cave out of the rocky terrain or he had quite a good number of followers who at his behest dug out the cave in that dense forest. Though it has been seen that the Sheikh had acquired substantial assets before his retirement, it was perhaps not just due to his wealth that the cave was dug out within no time, rather it was his fame, influence and popularity which made his followers to fulfil his wish.

When his mother came to know about his whereabouts she went to that place. Alarmed by the surroundings in which her only son was passing his days, she warned him of the danger from the reptiles and beasts lurking about. The Sheikh, however, politely replied, "Snakes and rats are my kith and kin." A lengthy *tete-a-tete* is reported to have taken place between mother and son. This conversation is in verse form. It cannot be doubted that an intelligent woman who had lived in the company of saint-poetess Lal Ded and had occasions to talk to Syed Hamdani and other scholars did compose impromptu verses, but from the thought and texture of these

couplets it appears that there is considerable interpolation in this long poem entitled "Gopha Bal" (Cave dwelling).

When the mother's doleful entreaties and loving persuasion failed to convince the son, she returned home utterly disappointed. She then motivated her daughter-in-law to go with her young children and try to exercise moral pressure upon her husband. Zai went to the cave with her son and daughter. The Sheikh told her: "Leave them to the care of the Lord Who alone shall decide my course of action." The wife left the children to sleep under the blanket of their father and returned home. After a while she felt perturbed, rushed to the cave and tried to awaken the children. But alas! She found them dead.

The news spread like wild fire. Some attributed the incident to the supernatural powers of the Sheikh whereas others charged him with criminal liabilities. Some "interested" persons went to the far-off village of Dada Sara to inform his in-laws. The influential brothers of Zai lodged a criminal complaint of double murder against him, warrants for his arrest were issued and the same were entrusted for execution to a notorious and arrogant police officer, Tazi Bhat. The executant reached the entrance of the cave uttering filthy language and hurling abuses on the Sheikh. But in spite of his strong will, sufficient valour and rudeness, the police officer trembled at the sight of the cave.

The humble Sheikh came out and gazed at the police officer who reeled under his looks and felt that his long moustaches had turned into dragons which were biting his cheeks. He fell at the feet of the saint and thereafter remained in the cave with him, served him throughout his life and was ultimately buried by the side of his teacher at Tsrari-Sharief.

It was during this period that the Sheikh's chief disciple and comrade, Baba Nassar, joined him. Within a brief period this cave became a centre of preaching, and people from all parts of the valley came here to seek his blessings and guidance. The popularity which the Sheikh was gaining caused a chain reaction resulting in jealousy and conspiracies. Unscrupulous elements joined hands to malign the saint. Intrigues and conspiracies were hatched to invite royal wrath against the man who was engaged in purification of his self for the public good. Anthologists have recorded King Sultan Sikandar once contracted some serious disease which the royal physicians failed to cure. The royal

astronomers poisoned the ears of the king and coined a story to defame the Sheikh and implicate him in a fictitious case. According to them, some hypocrite living in a kingdom had deceived the people, cheated the innocent and maligned the respectable and as a consequence the king of that country developed some physical disability which could not be cured until the hypocrite was located and punished.

When such stories were narrated to Sultan Sikandar he issued a proclamation for tracing out the hypocrite who was exploiting his subjects. Within no time a few of his courtiers came with the information that a 'butcher of human values' had in the guise of a saint let loose exploitation in and around Kaimoh village. The Sultan thereupon issued orders for his arrest.

Sheikh Noor-ud-Din came to know about all this in advance by intuition. Instead of being dragged to the royal court, he surrendered voluntarily and requested the Sultan to punish him. Sultan Sikandar, at the very first sight, became an admirer of the saint. He got him seated by his side with reverence. The ailment of the Sultan also vanished.

After spending more than seven years in his cave dwelling, the Sheikh left on a tour of the country along with his chief disciple. On the first leg of the extensive tour starting from Kaimoh he went to Islamabad (Anantnag) where he took rest for a while to pay obeisance at a particular spot in the town. His companion was astonished to note this gesture of his guide and when he enquired about it the Sheikh replied: "This is the eternal abode of our worthy successor." About two hundred years after this prophecy Baba Hardi Reshi, a great saint, lived in this town and upon his death was buried at that very place.

A Hindu saint named Bum Sadhu, born immediately after the birth of the Sheikh in the house of a yogi of Khai village, had settled in Bumazuwa village. It is not clear whether this locality was named after Bum Sadhu or whether the sadhu himself had acquired the 'Bum' as title due to his abode in that village. The sadhu had acquired fame for his untiring meditation, miraculous deeds and dedication to his religion. It is said that he had acquired such great mystic powers that he would, at one and the same time, attend 360 temples situated along a distance of 70 miles from Anantnag to Baramulla and simultaneously offer prayers to all the deities in these temples.

A detailed metaphysical conversation took place between him and the Sheikh for three days. What transpired between them could neither be understood nor guessed by anyone. Hence no details are available of it. However detailed versified discourse recorded in later *Reshi Namas* and *Noor Namas* is attributed to them. It consists of questions and answers relating to certain social habits of Muslims or Hindus. However, it is hard to imagine that such petty matters could have dominated during the discussions between two great spiritualists.

Both of them at first seem to have demonstrated their spiritual eminence and finally Bum Sadhu, accepting the superiority of the Sheikh, joined the galaxy of his disciples. He embraced Islam, was renamed Bam-ud-Din and was made the head of the first Reshi sub-centre at Bumazuwa.

In the course of his first tour which he undertook during the reign of Sultan Ali Shah in 1416, the Sheikh established centres and sub-centres of the Reshi movement in various *parganas* of Kashmir and himself spent some time in meditation at each place. After paying a brief visit to Bumazuwa he went to the picturesque spot of Tsimer situated at the foot of the Pir Pansal ranges.

By that time he had a sizeable number of devoted disciples which included Baba Taj-ud-Din (formerly Tazi Bhat), Baba Qutb-ud-Din, Baba Nassar and others. Nassar was with him during all the tours. Baba Qutb-ud-Din was a Sanskrit scholar and in his quest for a matured spiritual guide he went to many sadhus, sanyasis and rishis but could not quench his spiritual thirst till he found the cave dweller of Kaimoh from whom he got what he desired. His earlier name was Kati Pandit and he was renamed Qutb-ud-Din by his leader. He was the Sheikh's personal secretary and also worked as secretary-general of the Reshi organisation. He preserved the verses and the sayings of his leader by recording them in the Sharda script.

During the same period Sanskrit, which was the official language and medium of instruction, was replaced by Persian. The script of the Kashmiri language was also subjected to an immediate process of change—from Sharda to Persian. The result was that the later-day authors of *Noor Namas* and *Reshi Namas* completely missed this original source due to their ignorance of the Sharda script. Neither the verses nor sayings of the Sheikh

nor record of the Reshi movement maintained by him could be consulted.

The trio of the Sheikh's disciples, Taj, Qutb and Nassar, accompanied him to Tsimer and during his stay there he knew by intuition that another would-be saint awaited his help. Through difficult terrain the Sheikh crossed over to Palmad, a small valley in Kishtwar. Jai Singh, the only son of the local jagirdar, was seriously ill. The dejected parents were informed by some people that a saint living in Kashmir could cure their son but it was impossible for them to carry the ailing boy to Kaimoh. Next day they found a faqir in their house who was none else but Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. He cured the boy and left for Kashmir with the instructions that on his full recovery he should be sent to him. Jai Singh recovered and insisted on going to Kashmir but his mother did not allow him. Consequently he again fell ill and was taken in the same condition to the Sheikh. Later Jai Singh became a Muslim and was renamed as Zain-ud-Din. He was enrolled in the Reshi order and given independent charge of the sub-centre at a place now called Aish Muqam.

During 1417-18 the Sheikh established another sub-centre on the outskirts of Srinagar—at Mukhta Pukhri (Spring of Pearls) near Soura where the Sheri-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences is now situated. He spent nearly a year at this place in meditation. He had selected that place for two reasons, its beautiful surroundings and the ease with which he could spread his influence deep into the houses of princes and the elite who lived in the neighbouring civil lines. Two important events took place here. First, the conversion of Ludi Raina Raja of Madaw Wadwan and secondly, the episode of Yawan Masti.

One morning when the Sheikh was in deep meditation in his hut the lawns outside were filled with the melodious voice of singing birds. The sound of an orchestra added to the attraction. The atmosphere became intoxicating as a sweet female voice rose amid the musical surroundings. A *nartaki* was singing and dancing to the tune of the orchestra. Distracted by the noise, the Sheikh came out and admonished the dancer, "Yawan Mats" (The intoxicated youth) who responded by smiling coquettishly. The Sheikh got very annoyed and the frightened companions of the dancer started running. "Yawan Mats" was perplexed to see the condition of her companions and shouted

to stop them, but they fled faster. The dancer then followed them. At a short distance from the Sheikh's hut, one of her dressers offered her a mirror. The dancer cried in despair on seeing her face distorted. The young, beautiful and attractive lady had turned an ugly hag. Repenting for her blunder, she fell at the feet of the saint and promised to lead a pious life.

The Sheikh has composed a thought-provoking lyric giving his experience relating to this incident. The poem is allegorical, symbolic and mystical. The dancing girl thereafter remained a dedicated disciple of the Sheikh. As per her last wish she was buried in front of the main entrance to the Sheikh's shrine. Every pilgrim who enters the shrine to offer *fateha* has to walk over her grave. Among his women disciples she is known by her original name of Shanga Bibi.

The Sheikh later went to Draigam, now in Badgam district. This village and the area around it was the estate of a rich peasant Sangi Ganai, who offered his hut and some of his land to the saint who spent considerable time there and later shifted his headquarters from Kaimoh. It is believed that a group of 800 to 1,200 Kashmiri Brahmins under the leadership of a scholar and sadhu, Tuli Raina, met the Sheikh at this place and put a volley of questions to him about religion, spiritualism, metaphysics, life after death and existence of God. The Sheikh humbly and politely satisfied them and their aggressive posture cooled down. Finally they entered his Reshi order. The Sheikh deputed each of them to a village or *pargana* to propagate the message of truth and to serve mankind by helping the needy and disabled, planting fruit and shady trees on pathways and highways, offering water to the thirsty, building link roads and repairing canals and tanks.

From Draigam the Sheikh temporarily shifted to a remote area in Baramulla district called Gohan Ladi jungle. There also he established a sub-centre of the Reshi movement. During this period he also stayed at several other places in caves, huts or open area but such halts were very brief. At every such place where the Sheikh basked in the sun or got his head shaved or sat for a while, the people after his death erected memorials. In this manner almost every second village in Kashmir has got a shrine preserving the memory of his visit or connected with the visit of his disciple or successor.

During his second tour of the valley the Sheikh halted at some conspicuous place in every *pargana*. The valley was then divided into 36 *pargana*.

In the course of his third tour he is reported to have visited every village and it is said that he was so weak and feeble that he could not walk. His dearest comrade, Baba Nassar, had prepared a basket of willow branches in which he carried the Sheikh on his shoulders from one place to another. Wherever the Sheikh would ask him to stop, Nassar halted and the Sheikh would come down to meet the people.

During the last days of his life the Sheikh had shifted the headquarters of his movement permanently to "Tsrar" which was a dense forest. After his death he was buried at this place which soon developed into a township. The present name of the town is Tsrari-Sharief.

It is reported that in this forest there was an orchard of fruit trees belonging to the estate holder Sangram Dar, who became a disciple of the Sheikh and gifted away the orchard to him. The Sheikh in his lifetime established the main training centre for Reshis at Tsrar. A mosque was constructed by the Sheikh himself which was later developed into the present *khanqah*.

While on his way from Draigam to Tsrar the Sheikh made halts at two other places, Rupawan and Rahkay. It is reported that more than 300 Muslim theologians stormed the abode of this feeble man at Rupawan and tried to embarrass him with intricate questions about Muslim theology and allied matters. The Sheikh had in his verses exposed both mullahs and Brahmins and they in return had dubbed him as illiterate, a hypocrite butcher and heretical innovator. They expected to expose him but he in return gave versified clarifications on 130 issues connected with the fundamentals of Islam. This poem, preserved in records, proves his deep understanding of Islam, his mathematical acumen and his grasp on geography. All these mullahs conceded his superiority and joined the evening prayer led by the Sheikh. Among them Sharief Ashwar and Mullah Pir Baaz became disciples of the Sheikh. It is reported that all these scholars were accommodated in a hut which could normally accommodate only two persons.

During his tours the Sheikh made certain observations about

some localities, their people and the environment and location of certain regions. Such comments and observations, in poetic form, give a true picture of life in those localities and regions.

Before we describe Sheikh Noor-ud-Din's last days it is most pertinent to have a discussion on his teachers and guides. Anthropologists, biographers and historians have made a mess of this important subject. To name one spiritual leader as a disciple of another spiritualist does neither demonstrates the superiority of the latter nor makes the former inferior. Unfortunately the people have gone to the extremes while discussing this delicate issue. On the one hand attempts have been made to show the Sheikh as disciple of some or the other saint while on the other he has been shown to be above such formalities. It is a known fact that the Sheikh was a born saint, but in spite of this there was the need to chisel his ingrained capacities.

There are two aspects of the guidance provided in the mystic fold. A guide, like a teacher, solves some riddles for the seeker or helps in the solution of some intricacies which the latter faces in his mystic experiences. The strict way to impart spiritual training is to admit the taught within the limited fold of the specific mystic order to which the teacher belongs and make him chief or member of that order.

At various stages in his life the Sheikh required guidance and received the same from a few mystic leaders but he was not enrolled to any mystic order. The first who gave the taste of true love as the first diet to new-born Sheikh, was Lal Ded. Thus while the Sheikh can be said to have benefited from her benign mystic perfection he can never be treated as her disciple. He has recognised the eminence of Lal Ded in this couplet:

“Ta's Padman Porichi La'ley
Tami Amrit Chon Gali Galey
Tas Sani Autar Luley
Teoth Me War Dito Divo!”

Oh, my Lord! Bestow upon me the same blessings,
Which you have bestowed upon
Lal of Padmanpora,
Whom you made to drink the nectar in abundance
And who has lulled saints in her lap.

The poet, describing the qualities of Lal Ded, says that she has become immortal and has lulled saints in her lap. Tradition reveals that only one saint adorned the lap of saint-poetess Lal Ded and he was the Sheikh himself. In short, in this couplet on the one side he eulogises Lal Ded and on the other indirectly reveals his own position as a saint. The relationship between the two, as inferred from this verse, is that of a son and mother and not of *shash* and *guru* (disciple and teacher).

The second important spiritual personality with whom the Sheikh was connected from his early age (with whom even his family had intimacy) was Syed Hussain Simnani. The Sheikh, while praising this saint says that he was the guide and teacher of his father, Salar Sanz. Had the Sheikh received any mystic guidance from Simnani he would have stated the same with more stress. Baba Nasib, 16th century biographer of the Sheikh, while describing the contacts of the two confines their relationship to mutual love and appreciation. Syed Simnani was fond of the Sheikh as both person and poet. Thus no relationship of *pir* and *mursed* (teacher and taught) existed between them.

According to tradition, the third personality with whom the Sheikh came in contact was Mir Syed Ali Hamdani. The Amir's spiritual concentration on Kashmir was due to his desire to guide the Sheikh. The latter was only six years old when the Amir paid his last visit to the valley. Although it is said that the Amir went to Kaimoh to see the budding saint and entrusted his care to Syed Simnani and Lal Ded, few factors go to challenge the authenticity of this deep-rooted tradition. It is said that the contemporary record or later treatises written about the Amir do not contain this incident. There are certain matters which need to be borne in mind before making the assessment of these records.

It has been said more than once that the contemporary Sanskrit chroniclers have omitted any mention of Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. Such omissions cannot amount to a denial of the very existence of these two pillars of our history. In the same manner they have also omitted the details of the Amir's visits. As regards later histories or biographies written about the Sheikh it can be safely said that a certain "complex" was working behind all these writings. The riddle can be solved if we are able to locate either the *History of Kashmir* written by

Mulla Ahmad or if we lay our hands on his commentary on the verses of the Sheikh or if the history of Kashmiri saints written by Baba Adhami is traceable. Hence if later histories or other biographical documents omit any important incidents relating to the Sheikh or his disciples, this cannot provide a basis to deny facts so deeply rooted in tradition. It is a fact that Badakhshi¹ was a disciple of the Amir and the account given by him about his master cannot but be authentic. It is, however, strange that he has not made any mention of the Amir's activities in Kashmir. Consequently this source has no relevance to us. As regards *Fatuhati-Kubravi*, it was written by Noori nearly four hundred years after the Amir's death. Hence minute details would not have been available to the author at that later stage. Here again, one has to seek solution from the poetry of the Sheikh itself, which is a vital source not only for knowing facts about him but to know even his age. In a verse he says:

Nund Rishi made a request to Shah of Hamdan,
To lead him to paradise in his own company.

It is essential to see whether the poet has written these lines just eulogising the spiritual eminence of the Amir (Shahi-Hamdan) or whether the gist of these verses is just a wish which a devotee expresses in a state of ecstasy. The poet has used past tense in these verses. Had they been merely in praise of Shahi-Hamdan he would either say that "Shahi-Hamdan blessed Nund Rishi with the promise of paradise" or "Shahi-Hamdan would take Nund Rishi with him to paradise" or "Nund will request Shahi-Hamdan on the day of resurrection to take him to paradise in his own company." The language of these verses, on the other hand, conveys direct sense. The only impact which these verses leave is that the Sheikh directly (at a meeting) requested Shahi-Hamdan to take him to paradise in his own company. It is also manifest that the idea underlying is of immature Noor-ud-Din and not of the matured saint. In a quatrain later the poet says:

¹Syed Noor-ud-Din Badakhshi (d. A.D. 797) was a disciple of the Amir who wrote *Khulastutul Manaqib* which depicts the achievements of his teacher.

With narrow-minded selfish interest,
For petty desire of paradise
And for dreadful awe of hell
They worship Thee, My Lord.

A saint, who considered the pleasures of paradise as petty selfish interest, would not have made such a petty request to a senior saint in case he had composed the said verse in praise of the Amir at a ripe age. It is thus clear that in the above verse the Sheikh has only summed up the gist of his meeting, at his immature age, with a matured saint.

Metaphorically "taking to paradise in his company" only meant to lead the "seeker" to spiritual eminence. It is thus evident that such a request was (a) direct, (b) made by the Sheikh at his budding spiritual stage of life, and (c) it was made to seek entry into the Amir's mystical order. In the elegy which the Sheikh's woman disciple Sham Bibi composed on his death, the poetess remarks:

Oh ye, the taught of the Amir,
Thou hast humiliated with thy wit and wisdom
Scholars and theologians in discourses.

Sham Bibi has used the word *tsar*¹ which means the pupil. She has used neither *shash* nor *mureed* which are words relevant to relationships in mysticism.

There is, therefore, sufficient internal evidence to prove that the two had met and the young Sheikh desired guidance from the Amir. It was practically difficult to admit a six year old child into a mystic order. He left the Sheikh to the care of Syed Simnani.

Lastly, there is evidence both in later historical accounts and biographies of the Sheikh that the illustrious son of Amir viz. Syed Mohammad Hamdani, had more than one meeting with the Sheikh.

It is reported that Syed Mohammad led a delegation of distinguished foreign missionaries and Ulemas to Tsrar, where the

¹"Taste kore" is particularly used for woman disciples whereas male disciples are either called Khalifa or Mureed.

Sheikh was stationed those days. The Sheikh came to know about their arrival and proceeded to receive them. The parties met at a place called Zalus (now a small village situated nearly 26 km from Srinagar en route Tsrari-Sharief).

It is reported that some of the companions of Syed Mohammad had reservations about the meeting of their leader with "an illiterate, simple and humble man." They nourished various misgivings about the Sheikh. One of them, Syed Ghulam Din, who was *mauzin* of Syed Mohammad, stood up to deliver the evening *azan*. The Sheikh ordered him not to do so as the time was not ripe. Ghulam Din hesitated to obey but his leader warned him. Then the Sheikh called Ghulam Din nearby and put his hand on his head. Ghulam Din then realised that due to dark clouds the atmosphere looked murky whereas the sun was yet to set. This experience made Ghulam Din change his mind and thereafter he remained at the service of the Sheikh and after his death was buried in the suburbs of Srinagar where the famous Mughal Gardens are situated.

The Sheikh very politely replied to the questions put to him by the Mir. His extreme humility caused a reaction among his own colleagues and two of his women disciples, Duhat Ded and Buhat Ded, intervened actively in the deliberations. The Mir was highly impressed by the wise and matured statements of these two ladies. The meeting concluded with remarks of appreciation for each other from both sides. Biographers of the Sheikh have remarked about the conclusion of the meeting saying that "the two derived benefit from each other".

Very recently a document has been identified as a letter of authority executed by Mir Mohammad and authenticated by Sultan Sikandar bearing the date of execution as 1408. One school of thought considers the deed as a Letter of Authority admitting the Sheikh into the Kubrawi mystic order which the Mir led at that time. On the other hand, a good number of scholars doubt the authenticity of this deed. Both have plus and minus points and it requires a detailed discussion to accept or reject any of the two views. However, we will have to pinpoint briefly certain matters relating to this document.

The authenticity of this deed cannot be treated too ordinarily as it is the only piece of contemporary evidence available about the eminence, greatness and popularity that the Sheikh enjoyed

during his lifetime. The fact that the deed was authenticated by a king with his seal and signature adds one more dimension to the multi-dimensional personality of the Sheikh. The deed is inscribed on deer skin in the Arabic script and is preserved as a relic in Khanqahi-Moulla at Srinagar.

The doubts expressed are also based on sound logic. It is recorded that Mir Mohammad entered Kashmir in 1393 and stayed there for twelve years. Thus his year of departure was 1405. Haji Mohi-ud-Din has said that the Mir stayed in Kashmir for twenty-two years. Since he quotes no earlier source in support, his isolated view cannot rebut the earlier record. The Haji wrote his book during the early years of this century and the facts which he has narrated are already contained in previous historical records. He has made the only deviation about this fact but without assigning any reason for his difference of opinion. Syed Ali, author of a Persian chronicle written only after a hundred years after the death of Mir, records that the latter stayed in Kashmir only for twelve years.

Recently, Dr. Riaz in his book *Mir Syed Hamdani* written in Urdu also records the arrival of Mir Mohammad in Kashmir in 796 A.H. and his departure in 817 A.H. He more or less follows Haji Mohi-ud-Din but does not quote any earlier sources. Hence the school believing in the earliest view about his stay in Kashmir, challenges the very existence of this deed. The followers of the other school of thought consider the document as an authentic piece of contemporary record about the Sheikh. However, the deed has been wrongly construed as "Khati Irshad" (Letter of Authority). It does not bear any title, hence from its own contents an appropriate title can be derived. It is an established fact that the title of a deed can be determined and gathered from its own construction. The following facts need to be kept in mind before we accord any title to this deed:

1. The contents do not mention that the seeker (Sheikh) had sought admission to the Mir's mystic order.
2. It does not formally admit the Sheikh into any mystic order.
3. It only recognises the spiritual eminence of the Sheikh and contains a *fatwa* (expert juristic opinion) that the Reshi practices of the Sheikh were permissible.

The deed is so drafted that it appears an authoritative pronouncement about the spiritual eminence of the Sheikh admitted by Mir. Further, its contents indicate that the executant had keen and sincere desire to resolve some controversy. It also appears clearly a *fatwa*. Thus these peculiar contents presuppose the existence of some background necessitating the admission of the Sheikh's spiritual eminence by documentation, an existence of some controversy needed to be resolved and the existence of some disagreement with the practices of the Sheikh. It is an independent topic for research to probe into this background. However, some reasonable questions do emerge and their ordinary treatment will at least make some justice to the topic.

Why such a *fatwa*? What prompted the Mir to reduce to writing a *fatwa* type opinion? Why was the deed got authenticated by the king and not by any other spiritualist belonging to the Mir's mystic order as is the practice while issuing a *Khilafat-Nama*?¹ For a reply to these questions a reference to the background is highly relevant.

We have seen earlier that many companions of the Mir had reservations about the spiritual eminence of the Sheikh. His humility was dubbed as illiteracy and it was considered dangerous to leave the leadership of the religion in the hands of an illiterate person. Many of the foreign Ulemas and Syeds were fond of worldly positions. They had pride in their superior knowledge, superior descent and culture. On the other hand, there was sharp reaction against this superiority cult within the Reshi circles which is manifest from the fact that two lady disciples of the Sheikh intervened when their master behaved humbly during his meeting with the Mir. It is further evident from the fact that Syed Ghulam-ud-Din, a companion of the Mir, hesitated in the same meeting to deliver the call for prayers (*azan*) strictly per directions of the Sheikh.

The Sheikh had left an impact even on the non-Muslim population by his vegetarian food habits, simplicity and by his gnostic practices akin to indigenous traditions of meditation. He

¹Khilafat Nama is a Letter of Authority allowing the formal entry into mystic order and authorising the disciple to carry on that particular order to the posterity.

used the local language as a forceful tool for his message and thus his influence penetrated deep into the masses. The Mir had complete identity of purpose with the Sheikh but those foreigners who had come to Kashmir to regain their lost prestige and position felt a danger for themselves in the popularity of the Sheikh. The privileged Brahmins had an identity of interest with this foreign element and they too had felt overawed by the emerging cult of the Sheikh. Consequently, both of them joined and dubbed the Sheikh an "illiterate hypocrite". On the other hand, the Sheikh attacked both of them with deep sarcasm and sweeping satire. He dubbed the theologians, both local and foreign, as *mullahs* and accused the Brahmins of dividing the humanity on a caste basis for their own nefarious interests. The Sheikh eulogised the Mir in his verses as the "wisest son of the wisest father". To reciprocate the sentiments, the Mir executed this deed, got it authenticated by the Sultan and set confrontation at rest by declaring the practices of the Sheikh permissible under Shariat and by according documentary recognition of the eminence of the Sheikh.

This action of the Mir was one of the causes which brought him in conflict with other foreign *ulemas* including Syed Mohammad Hisari who represented the orthodox view. The Mir was sure that the interests of the religion were safe in the hands of the Sheikh and he himself left for Haj, and never returned to Kashmir.

Thus while the Sheikh was fortunate enough to receive the affectionate patronage of Shahi-Hamdan, motherly love from Lal Ded, mental and spiritual company from Mir Mohammad, he received formal guidance from none of them. He squarely belonged to the Owaisi mystic order and received light from Prophet Mohammad directly. He has clearly described his genealogy in his verses. This small poem illustrates his spiritual descent;

The first Rishi is the Mohammad,
And the second the Owais of Qarna,
The third Rishi is the Zalka,
Whereas the fourth is Plas Rishi,
Fifth in the order is Miran Rishi,
Sixth the Ruma,

I, the seventh, have been ignored by all. Who am I?
What a Rishi I am.

Thus the saint-poet has in unambiguous terms claimed himself as an Owaisi saint. He claims to have inherited this position and status through the local Reshi saints of Kashmir who had direct spiritual contact with Mohammad.

Before concluding this chapter it is necessary to mention the Sheikh's food habits. His diet was simple. Though he lived on simple diet even during his pre-cave days, it is not known whether he was then also vegetarian or became so later on. It is also believed that he seldom took cereals in the later days of his life.

He wore a simple dress consisting of a *pheran* (Kashmiri gown) stitched out of a coarse blanket. Reportedly it was used by him till his death. This *pheran* is preserved as a relic in his shrine.

Dreadful fear made me to give up material world,
And so I used a single gown throughout my life,
With the contentment I conquered the world of
contradictions,
And did travel the whole universe without
moving from my place.

He treated his disciples as his sons and daughters. They also reciprocated with love, obedience and dedication. The circle of his disciples was very wide. They included Brahmins, Thakurs, local Ulemas and Syeds.

The Sheikh lived for sixty years and few months and passed away in Rupanwan village on the 26th of Jami-du-Sani 842 A.H. (corresponding to A.D. 1438.)

As soon as the news of his death spread, delegations of people under the leadership of local Reshi saints came from all parts of Kashmir and within two days a congregation of more than nine lakh people from various regions assembled claiming the mortal remains of the saint for burial in their respective areas. Sultan Zainulabidin was himself present. He also insisted on taking the dead body for burial to Srinagar. Ultimately sensing the angry mood of the people, his chief disciple Baba

Nassar went close to the coffin. Within no time he returned towards the eagerly awaiting audience of lakhs of people and assured them that the body shall itself choose its last abode. People felt contented.

The body was taken for the last bath which was performed on the trunk of a walnut tree in Tsrar and his funeral prayers were also offered there on a hill-top. Thereafter the coffin soared into the high heavens. While the people from different regions were eagerly looking towards the sky they found the direction of the flying coffin confined to their own respective area. So they eagerly rushed back to their own regions to perform the last rites of their popular saint. As a result the gathering thinned to a limited number of inmates of the Reshi centre at Tsrar. On the third day Baba Nassar declared to the whole nation that the coffin had dived deep at a particular place near a rose bush in Tsrar and automatically the burial was complete. The Baba also pinpointed the place. The Sultan ordered the despatch of building material from the royal stores at nearby Khampur Saria and a structure was erected around the grave of the Sheikh. Baba Nassar, Sheikh's chief disciple, became the first Mujawir. This Khilafat continued till the 16th century when Junaid Rishi made it a hereditary office.

Tsaran, a dense forest where a local estate holder Sangram tended his cattle, started becoming habitable and is now a densely populated town, biggest in the district of Badgam. After some time Tsaran became Tsrar and later on Tsrari-Sharief. It is situated in the south-west of Srinagar and has a population of eight thousand. The Sheikh had himself stated about it:

I shall search my Lord at this chosen place.

Tsaran literally means to search out or to choose. A small poem of the Sheikh which provides some hints about his bio-data:

On my birth the cradles were decorated,
In the third year my hands were tied,
In the twelfth year my vision became clearer,
In the fifteenth I got engaged,
And in the sixteenth year the stream of my conscience

was over-flooded.
In the eighteenth I fell in the lap of eternal love,
In the twentieth year of my life
The fire within me was burnt by the fire of love.
In the twenty-fifth year I became the target of
accusation,
And in the thirtieth year my youth decayed,
In the fifth decade of my life I was made to wander
around the world,
During the sixties I shall be taken to my grave.

Reshout (Reshe-ism)

Reosh is the Kashmiri word for *rishi* (Saint). In Sanskrit it means one who sings hymns in praise of the Lord but in Kashmiri the word became so elastic as to include such spiritual leaders who dedicated their lives to meditation, in the service of mankind and who left a good stock of wise sayings for posterity. Noor-ud-Din Wali gave new dimensions to this word but later historians and anthologists made many deviations in defining this term. Some connected its origin to the Persian word *r'esh* meaning wound and some confined it to its literal Sanskrit connotation.

The Reshi mystic order is a completely local spiritual movement which developed as a natural consequence of the interaction between several mystic movements in this fertile land. Kashmir was the cradle of Shaivistic philosophy and Buddhist influence had taken deep roots in its environment. We find the influence of these philosophies on the poetry of both Lal Ded and Sheikh. Islam was introduced in the hill ranges of Kashmir through the efforts of Iranian Sufi saints.

Kashmir was originally a waterlogged area called Sati-Sar. Legend has it that a demon lived around this area and his terror deterred habitation. Owing to the miraculous deeds of Kashyap *rishi* an outlet for water emerged near Baramulla and the demon was killed. Thereafter human being found an abode in this happy vale. Thus the very foundation of this land is attributed to the miraculous deeds of a saint and hence miracles, supernatural actions and metaphysical tradition became the cornerstone of its cultural essence. Due to this national character of Kashmir, only such religious movements took roots in its soil which possessed spiritual superiority, propagated high ideals, imparted gnostic supremacy and performed miraculous deeds. It is in this background that Buddhism also flourished here and Shaivism

dominated the religious scene for a pretty long time. In such a socio-religious scenario Islam and its mystic teachings found a congenial atmosphere during the fourteenth century. Buddhist monks had lost their zeal and fervour and a hypocritical attitude had crept into the ranks of local Brahmins. Thus the soil was quite fertile for change.

The ideas of these Sufis were more or less akin to the principles of local philosophies. Tassawaf had already received some influence from Buddhist philosophy before its entry into the valley and the local people found it somehow familiar to their thinking. This interaction and synthesis of local Shaivistic philosophy and ideals of Buddhism with teachings of Tassawaf provided a theoretical material for emergence of a new spiritual order well suited to the deep-rooted traditions of Kashmir and its changed celestial atmosphere.

Besides this theoretical background there were practical compulsions, both positive and negative, which made the ground fertile for the emergence of a new mystic order.

The mass conversion that took place in Kashmir at the hands of Sufi saints initially left the Brahmins and local religious leaders cold but later they realised the gravity of the situation and started reconsolidation of their ranks. On the other hand, hundreds of Syeds, Ulemas and Sheikhs had entered Kashmir with Shah Hamdan and his son, Mir Mohammad, who had established centres and sub-centres of their activities in every nook and corner. This situation posed a threat of confrontation between the two camps. Thus a genuine need for a conciliatory third force arose which could on the one hand permanently avoid the confrontation and on the other create a spiritually oriented social order.

In both these camps all were not sincere, all were not genuine and conscious of their respective causes. Among foreign missionaries a good number consisted of those Syeds who, due to the high-handedness of Timur, were deprived of their position, status and amenities which they enjoyed in their respective homelands. When they got refuge in Kashmir they found conditions favourable for them to win back their socio-political status.

In the same manner local Brahmins who had dominated the political scene in Kashmir for centuries found their position shattered. To regain their lost prestige and status they also

infiltrated deeply both in the political set-up and socio-religious life of Kashmir. This situation also created an imminent threat of confrontation.

Overzealous new converts like Saif Bhat (previously Seha Batta), Prime Minister of Sultan Sikandar, had created an open situation of religious intolerance. On the other hand, few of his cousins who had not changed their religion were also deeply planted in the royal court and formed part of the mischievous bureaucracy. The open aggressive postures of Saif Bhat and inner intrigues of royal astronomers, court physicians and other civil servants (who were originally Brahmins) exposed Kashmir to dangers. To curb such policies of extremism was the need of the hour. It was impossible for any political movement to meet this challenge. Only a conscious religious movement deeply rooted in sentiments was an appropriate answer for it.

On the one hand there was the necessity to consolidate the gains of mass conversion and make its purpose everlasting while on the other hand there was the need for such a political order which would guarantee freedom of worship to every community. The Sheikh, on the basis of available raw material created a durable socio-religious system called "Re-shout" (Reshe-ism).

The confusion created by later historians and anthologists about the definition and connotation of the "Reshi" order is only misleading. All the later histories, biographies and anthologies were written in Persian and those authors translated "Reosl" as Reshi and "Reshout" as "Rea-Shiyat" in their books and so sought the meaning of these local terms from the Persian lexicon. It will be seen from the study of such records that these Persian histories have even distorted the names of villages and localities in Kashmir to suit their own peculiar phonetics. Thus we are hardly able to know the real definition, meaning an ambit of the "Reshi" order from these Persian sources. Later Urdu or English books also based their discussions on this subject upon these very sources.

The Sheikh claims himself to be the seventh Reshi but was in reality its founder. Hence to know the purport and essence of this order we need to revert to the verses of the very founder of this cult.

In a poem defining a true "Mussalman" the Sheikh has stated :

In the loneliness of wild nature,
One who bears the pangs of solitude,
By self-mortification overpowers the evil self,
Is meek and humble, a handful of dust,
And in such utter loneliness ponders upon the Reality,
He only deserves the title of Mussalman.

In another small poem summing up the qualities of a Reshi he says :

Strictly abiding by the "Reshout",
Rust on thy Heart shall vanish,
Alas ! Thou art not true to thy way of life,
Thou die in anger, jealousy and hatred.

Making a distinction between a real Reshi and a hypocrite he says :

They were saints of high spiritual order,
Wore rags and were lulled in the lap of nature,
They would beg for the chaff to subside their hunger,
But our contemporary Reshis are hypocrites,
Pretend to be vegetarian but relish pleasures privately,
They hardly remember the generosity of their Lord,
Such hypocrites hardly deserve the Reshi title.

These and such other verses provide us the following information about the Reshi order :

1. that, it was prevalent in Kashmir for a long time.
2. that living in solitude amidst the natural environment was its policy;
3. untiring meditation is its declared manifesto;
4. that a simple vegetarian diet was the essence of Reshi practice. Even begging with limited purpose for mere sustenance is permissible;
5. that self-mortification is the main path through which the Reshi can reach his destination;
6. that overpowering of the "Evil Self" is the sine qua non of this order;
7. that anger, jealousy, lust, greed, pride are unpardonable sins according to Reshi ethics;
8. that humility is the basic trait of the Reshi cult;
9. to ponder over the realities of this universe, the

Absolute Reality, the reality of life and soul is the purport of self-inflicted solitude.

From other verses the vital requirements of the Reshi order emerge as :

1. to serve mankind, help the needy, share the burden of the sick, infirm and weak;
2. to avoid injuring any living being whether in the form of greenery, insects or animals.

With these additional stresses in the theory and practice of their cult, the Reshis mainly propagated the teachings of Islam, embedded the essence of monotheism (Tawheed) in the minds of people and imparted the zeal for the love of the Prophet.

As already stated the Reshi cult does not originate from the Sheikh. A good number of famous Muslim Reshis lived in Kashmir prior to him. The Sheikh has in his verses provided us precise bio-data about few distinguished Reshi saints who lived before him. Miran Reshi lived on pure water for more than eighty years and Ruma Reshi, whose name has become synonymous with immortality, spent his long life in meditation. Plasman, Khalasman and Yasman Reshis were immediate predecessors of the Sheikh. But in spite of this, the traditional Reshi way of meditation was very rare. Reshis were scattered and their presence had the least impact on the socio-economic life of the state and the affairs of the government and a negligible effect even on religious life. The Sheikh, on the other hand, created a disciplined religious system out of the principles of Reshut, organised a cadre-based movement among the dedicated Reshis, devised a mystic cult which though difficult to practise, created a nucleus of watchdogs for society.

For popularising this Sufi order he established centres and sub-centres of his movement in almost every *pargana* or division. He used to spend some time at every such centre and sub-centre, train the cadre himself and thereafter leave the centre to the charge of one of his disciples.

Criticism of even the highest leader was not only allowed but encouraged. Once the Sheikh was sitting in a room close to his woman disciple, daughter of Sangi Ganai of Draigam, and was divulging to her the mystic secrets when Baba Zain-ud-Din, another trusted comrade of the Sheikh, entered the room.

Though he was conscious of the spiritual status of his master did not hesitate to drop an indirect hint that such proximity with a female could create suspicion in the mind of a stranger.

This organised cadre of Reshis did not only propagate ethical values but also abided by them. They not only preached the real essence of religious life but modelled their own personalities accordingly. They served the humanity by helping the needy, digging wells and canals and providing drinking water to travellers and people living on plateaus. They exposed tyranny, hypocrisy and falsehood and fought against religious interference of any kind. Thus it was the immediate result of this movement that an era of prosperity, tolerance, mutual understanding and mass development reached its zenith in Kashmir during the reign of Sultan Zainulabidin. His five decades of rule is considered the golden period of Kashmir's history. It was not merely the result of the monarch's broad-mindedness but his policies were the result of a silent revolution which the Reshi movement had brought about in the minds of both subjects and rulers.

The Reshi movement developed with full zeal and fervour. Reshi centres were established in every part of Kashmir. No political power could afford to invite displeasure of the Reshis though they had nothing to do with the administration of the state. Even during the Chak rule many political sufferers took refuge in Reshi centres. Later on the Reshis were also subjected to persecution for affording asylum to *persona non grata*. It is for these reasons that many Reshis left their places of domicile and fled to other parts of the state. But they could not escape the wrath of the persecutors and thus a commonly used proverb was coined:

Reosh ay tsali paneneh desheh
Toti tsales neh Reshi naw.

Even if a Reshi runs from his place of domicile, he cannot escape the stigma of his title.

In one of his couplets Zain-ud-Din warns that "bad days are ahead for Reshis". This statement provides us indirect but sufficient proof that the Reshi movement had come in conflict with the socio-political order and Zain-ud-Din was sure that only sacrifices would avoid the situation.

Intrigues

Anthologists, biographers and later historians have quoted certain incidents which took place during the life of the Sheikh but have given individual treatment to each such incident. After arraying all these facts in proper form and reading them collectively one can safely infer that they constitute the links of a chain of circumstances leading to the only conclusion that a web of intrigues was woven around the saint and his cadre.

After the death of the Sheikh's two children in the cave, some one informed his in-laws at Dada Sara, who lodged a complaint against him and orders for his arrest were issued and entrusted to the notorious police officer Tazi Bhat for execution.

This incident can be considered as the logical reaction to the sudden death of the two innocent children but it cannot be underestimated when we connect it with other circumstances and consider its dramatic nature.

Secondly, we have known that the mind of the Sultan was poisoned in a unique manner by some elements very close to the royal court. Such cunning elements exploited the situation and attributed the Sultan's incurable disease to the sinful and treacherous acts of "hypocrisy" of some "butcher" who had worn a saintly mask to deceive the people. The angry king issued orders of arrest, but the way in which the Sheikh responded caused dismay to all of them. Certain questions do arise which need to be properly answered. Why did those officials concoct a false story? Why did they malign a "faqir" who had no conflict with them? The reply is clear. They had no direct grudge against the Sheikh but acted as agents of some intrigue.

Thirdly, the episode of "Yawan Mats", the attractive and coquettish dancer, is no less important a link in the chain of

intrigues. Who deputed this dancing girl and with what purpose? This question also remains unanswered by the scattered material contained in historical accounts and biographical anecdotes.

It may be noted that later on a communal colour was imparted to both these incidents by anthologists and such other interpretations were given which are hardly reasonable.

It is said that the royal physicians and astronomers were Hindus. The astrologers, to save the physicians from royal wrath, made the Sheikh a scapegoat. But why should they have chosen only the Sheikh to save their co-religionist "Veds" and "Hakims"? It could not be without any machination and definite motives.

While explaining the background of the Yawan Mats episode these biographers have again fabricated an unbelievable anecdote. It is said that one of the princes had gone for hunting in the Pheykh area (now dotted by Mughal Gardens) and on his return he saw a good number of people dashing towards the ashram of a sadhu near Ishbera. The prince also entered the ashram to pay his respects, but the sadhu refused to grant him audience. The disappointed prince felt that the behaviour of the sadhu was hypocritical and he resolved to test the latter's character. A famous *nartaki* was deputed for the purpose. With her attractive and charming gestures she intoxicated the mind of the sadhu who ultimately proved to be a man of weak character. His disgrace at the hands of an ordinary woman was taken as an affront by the Hindus who made the Sheikh the target of their vengeance.

Why should the Hindus have chosen only the Sheikh for retaliation when he had no link with any family member of the king or prince? Why did not they choose any of the foreign saints who were closely connected with the seat of power and who were fanatically orthodox in both theory and practice? On the other hand, the Sheikh's practices were akin to the local Hindu philosophy. In deference to the sentiments of his fellow countrymen he had not only taken to vegetarian diet but his way of meditation was even dubbed as "Hinduised" by the orthodox Mullahs. During the period of Sultan Sikandar the overzealous newly converted minister, Malik Saif-ud-Din, had created a situation of communal tension. The Sheikh both

with his word and deed propagated against such religious intolerance. Lastly, at a time when local culture and traditions were under an imminent threat of extinction, the Sheikh proved the saviour of Kashmiri traditions. In these circumstances the Sheikh was the only champion of the cause of Kashmir and defender of local Hindus. Why should the members of the same community choose to malign their own saviour and defender? Hence the explanation offered by later anthologists is most untenable. However, it cannot be denied that all the three incidents connected together led to only one inevitable conclusion that an organised conspiracy worked against the Sheikh and the feeding centre of such intrigues was within the Durbar itself.

Viewed in these circumstances the mention by Jonaraja of the arrest and detention of Mulla Noor-ud-Din confines the reference to the Sheikh and none else. It is said that this reference is made about one Noor-ud-Din who was deputed as ambassador by Timur to Sultan Sikandar. This contention has no basis. There are no other connecting circumstances which would show that the ambassador had annoyed the Sultan to such an extent that the latter would take a risk to violate recognised rules of diplomacy. The assertion further becomes unbelievable for the reason that the Sultan would never have violated diplomatic immunities nor would he have invited the displeasure of a more powerful and terrific ruler like Timur. In these circumstances, the "Mulla Noor-ud-Din" who according to Jonaraja was arrested by the Sultan was none other than Sheikh Noor-ud-Din.

The explanation is clear. His mass popularity was threatening power-hungry officials, his policy of defending local traditions and culture was an affront to those foreign elements who looked down upon Kashmiris and boasted of their own high descent, superior learning and sophisticated culture. Above all, the elements which through their communal postures tried to disturb the peaceful social transformation, got annoyed with the preachings of the Sheikh and were disturbed by his reaction. They failed to defeat the Sheikh openly and so resorted to conspiracies and intrigues. A good number of local Brahmins went to the Sheikh under the leadership of Ladi Raina to pin him down but had to return humiliated. Almost all of them

later joined his organisation. In the same manner, three hundred Muslim mullahs went to the Sheikh with the intention of exposing him but got themselves exposed. Many companions of Mir Syed Mohammad Hamdani felt dejected that their leader dragged them to an illiterate and ignorant *faqir* but the most vocal among them viz. Syed Ghulam Din, became his devoted disciple. Even the most dignified spiritual leader, eminent scholar and politically powerful missionary, Mir Mohammad Hamdani, showered praises on the Sheikh. This disappointed those who wished to see a confrontation between the two saints dedicated to the same cause.

Within a brief period of the execution of the deed by Mir Mohammad recognising the spiritual stature of the Sheikh, a deep rift ensued between the Mir and another foreign scholar, Mir Mohammad Hisari. Hisari was no match for the popularity, power and worth of Hamdani but the latter thought it proper to leave Kashmir for larger interests.

The organisation of the Sheikh, though essentially non-political, later assumed a political character which remained a covert characteristic of the Reshi movement until and after the introduction of the imperialistic policies of subjugation initiated by Akbar.

A brief mention of one post-Sheikh incident will further fortify this view. During the reign of Zainulabidin, the "dearest" disciple of the Sheikh, Zainuddin Wali, was expelled from the valley. Again the later-day historians and anthologists have tried to shield the Sultan by citing a peculiar background for his harsh order. The explanation is ridiculous. It is said that the Sultan went to the *faqir* who did not grant him audience and the annoyed Sultan ordered his expulsion. It is hardly believable that a wise monarch like Bud Shah (Great King) would have exposed his fair name to criticism by posterity merely on such a petty ground. Such an order could have naturally been the result of some severe disagreement between the two "Zains".

During the rule of Bud Shah's father policies of extremism had damaged the fabric of mutual understanding and the Reshis under the leadership of the Sheikh had created a public opinion against religious discrimination. It seems that too much

liberalisation during the reign of Bud Shah provided chances of interference in the religious matters of the Muslims. This policy was also resented by the Reshi saint. Zainuddin Wali came out openly against this new type of extremism. Hence the doors of confrontation were opened. However, the Sultan after some years repented and recalled Zainuddin from Tibet. He was accorded a warm reception on his re-entry into Kashmir. All these isolated and scattered incidents quoted in various histories, *Noor Namas* and *Reshi Namas* lead us to the conclusion that the popularity of the Reshi order caused an under-current of disturbance within the ranks of those who enjoyed political privileges.

We have seen that the jealous intriguers had dubbed the Sheikh a "hypocrite" and "illiterate". On the other hand, the Sheikh himself exposed the hypocrite Reshis, caste-ridden Brahmins and exploiter mullahs. Hence to dub such a great saint with such an insinuation is both baseless and mischievous. Now we will see whether the Sheikh was really illiterate. It seems few theologians dubbed him illiterate for the reasons that (1) he had received no regular schooling, (2) he was simple, humble and unassuming, (3) he spoke neither Persian nor Sanskrit and (4) he used Kashmiri as an effective tool for his expression which was considered by both Brahmins and mullahs a language of illiterates.

Later, this stigma was adopted as a title for their patron by the fans of the Sheikh for two reasons: (1) to them the Sheikh was "Wali-i-Ummi" (illiterate saint), thus a strict follower of the Prophet who is Nabi-i-Ummi (illiterate prophet) and (2) his wise sayings, philosophical utterances, knowledge of religious intricacies and his command and control over mysticism all was attributed to his spiritual powers.

It is purely misrepresentation of facts. The verses of the Sheikh provide us more convincing reasons to believe that he had sufficient study of Islam, Kashmir's history, Shaivite philosophy and Buddhist teachings. Only precise hints are given here as a detailed discussion is not possible :

- (a) The Sheikh's poetry is replete with references from Kashmir's history and Muslim history.
- (b) The poetry of the Sheikh is considered as a Kashmiri

version of the Quran and a comparative study will clearly show that the bulk of his poetry is a versified Kashmiri translation of the Quran and Hadis.

(c) In his "Hundred-thirty Questions and Answers" though the Sheikh put in verse form the fundamentals of Muslim jurisprudence, his hold on Fiqah, geographical variations and mathematical calculations provides ample evidence of his scholarly aptitude.

(d) There are many mystic expressions in his poetry which are manifest instances of the fact that he had studied famous works on mysticism. Here is an example of one of his smaller poems:

"Iblis did weep bitterly and said:
Alas! I am undone in spite of my untiring meditation.
Who did separate me from Mansoor?
Both of us shared a common secret,
He divulged the "Anna" unwittingly,
And was encouraged by his Lord.
But alas! I was rejected till eternity,
I am cursed like a thief,
Disgrace is perpetuated upon me,
I knew His secret,
Had enough knowledge of the Reality,
He deemed the same befitting for me,
(To which I am now subjected)
And how can I undo His wish,
Only the gnostics can understand me."

Mansoor in his famous work *Kitab-al-Twasin* has said, "Iblis is my friend and Pharaoh my comrade."¹ It can be said that the two mystics gave vent to similar feelings but such close similarity even in symbols and mode of expression is not possible. It is, therefore, logical that the Sheikh might have studied the philosophy of Mansoor, besides having shared his mystic experience.

The campaign of vilification, though carried on in the most hypocritical way, continued even after his death. The defeated

¹*Kitab-al-Twasin* quoted by Nicholson in his *Legacy of Islam*, p. 217.

intriguers did not dare to come into the open but changed their tactics. They were conscious that any adverse remarks made openly against the Sheikh could not be tolerated so they tried to damage his personality by negative devices. The brief hints are provided here:

1. The bulk of contemporary material about the saint mysteriously disappeared within a century after his death. All the Persian chronicles of Shahmir dynasty including "Miratul-Awliya" (Mirror of Saints) by Mulla Ahmad and his history "Wiqai-Kashmir", and "Anthology of Kashmiri Saints" by Adhami have presumably been destroyed. On the other hand, Sanskrit chronicles of that period which did not contain any direct mention of the Sheikh were spared. This fact provides the basis to infer that those Persian histories and anthologies were made to disappear only to suppress correct information about the Sheikh.

2. Peculiar stories were devised to form the background of each poetic composition of the Sheikh and in doing so history was distorted. The most damaging and unfounded is the story concocted to suit as the background for his famous mystic poem entitled "The barking dog sayeth vow—sow, sow, sow". On the basis of such concoction the 18th century historian Khawaja Azam Dedamari even lost sight of real facts and gave a mischievous summing up of the pre-cave period of the Sheikh's life.

3. Such other concoctions were made which present to us the picture of a hermit Sheikh—an actionless Sanyasi. On the other hand, his poetry sufficiently establishes that he fought like a warrior (mujahid) against the forces of evil.

4. Though volumes were written about the life and poetry of the Sheikh, all such manuscripts were hoarded by few families and no student of history or research scholar was allowed access to these valuable gems. These hoarders also consciously or unwittingly contributed to the age-old intrigue.

5. Semi-literate Mullahs and illiterate singers recited from the pulpit or sang in music parties respectively not only the most incorrect version of his poetry but also distorted the same. On the basis of the same distorted version several scholars,

without taking the trouble to know or trace the original, made a misleading assessment and critical evaluation of the Sheikh's verse in recent past. Though many of them now express regret for their ignorance, nonetheless they unconsciously played the game of intrigue.

In these circumstances the befitting reply is to trace the relevant record and make proper assessment of the saint-poet both as author and thinker.

Epithets

Out of love, reverence and dedication the people of Kashmir have conferred various titles upon the Sheikh—Sheikh-ul-Aalam (Saint of the universe) and S'akhi (Generous) Noor-ud-Din. As a poet he used 'Nund', 'Nund Reosh' or 'Nund of Kaimoh' as his *nom de plume*. To mystics he is "Shamsul Aarifeen (sun among the saints), to Hindus he is "Schajanand" (the blissful) and to all Kashmiris he is "Alamdari-Kashmir" (the Standard-Bearer of Kashmir).

Alamdari of Kashmir

During the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries the socio-political structure of Kashmir had greatly collapsed owing to the Mongol invasion in 1320 which left deep wounds upon the mind and body of Kashmir.

Political exploitation was the rule of the day. Loot and ravage was destined for the masses. Natural calamities like droughts and floods added to the agony of the people.

The Muslim influence had already entered through the narrow snowbound passes. Some smaller colonies of Muslims had developed but loosely. It is not certain whether these contacts had left any influence upon the religious thinking of the local population. However, the missionary activities started with the arrival of Syed Abdur Rehman (Sharufuddin) Bulbul Shah in Kashmir during the reign of Suhadeva (1301-20.) He was a great Sufi saint owing allegiance to the Suharawardy mystic order. It is under his influence that the Buddhist ruler of Kashmir, Rinchana, embraced Islam as he was dissatisfied with Buddhist philosophy and apprehensive about the Brahmin-dominated caste-ridden Hindu society. He became the first Muslim Sultan of Kashmir and was accorded the title of Sultan Sadruddin. He ruled from 1320 to 1323. After his death his

widow, Kota Rani, again created political instability. Ultimately trusted minister of Sultan Sadruddin, Shah Mir, ascended the throne as Sultan Shamus-ud-Din in 1339 and thus laid the foundation of the Shahmir dynasty which ruled Kashmir for two centuries.

Another important event took place during the reign of Sultan Qutb-ud-Din, the grandson of Shah Mir. An outstanding missionary of the Muslim world, Mir Syed Ali Hamdani, paid three visits to Kashmir in 1372, 1379 and 1383. On his third visit he was accompanied by 700 Syeds and Ulemas who established centres of their activities in various parts of the country. The Amir revolutionised the religious atmosphere in Kashmir and introduced innovations in arts and crafts of the valley. He created a small Iran out of Kashmir; it is till date called "Iran in Miniature".

In 1393 the illustrious son of the Amir, Mir Mohammad entered Kashmir with three hundred Syeds and scholars and stayed in the valley for twelve years. He and his companions also established *khangahs* in different parts of the valley.

This influx posed a severe threat to Kashmiri culture and language. They introduced their own language, Persian, as the vehicle for delivering religious sermons and as the official language of the state.

The majority of these Syeds and Ulemas consisted of dedicated missionaries, sincere Sufis and selfless servants of the humanity but there were exceptions. Many Syeds had left their homeland due to the repressive measures adopted by Timur against them and sought refuge in Kashmir. They were fond of pomp and show and worldly position and so made efforts to rehabilitate themselves in Kashmir with their old prestige and position. These foreigners thus rose to high official positions and dominated the political scene.

They also had an identity of interests with the local bureaucrats and caste-ridden Brahmins. Both had a superiority complex. While the former had command over the Persian language and its literature the latter were masters of Sanskrit. To both these elements a common Kashmiri, who spoke the local language was only a second class citizen.

The missionary Syed had established preaching centres all over the valley where sermons were delivered mainly in their

mother-tongue.

People flocked to these Syeds in great numbers to seek their blessings and guidance. They would converse mainly in Persian with the local people and thus this language dominated public life. Simultaneously it took the place of Sanskrit as the official language. The job-hunter Brahmins quickly adopted this language. On the other hand, sadhus, sanyasis and the common Hindu stuck strictly to Sanskrit or Sanskritised Kashmiri.

This situation posed a potential threat to the Kashmiri language. During the seventh century the influx of alien cultural influences had not posed so much threat to the Coptic language in Egypt as it posed in Kashmir during the 14th century. Coptic, which was a favourite of the people and was patronised by Pharaohs for centuries, could not withstand even the proportionately weaker onslaught and was replaced by Arabic. Here the danger was more formidable. Neither the local intellectual nor the politician had ever encouraged Kashmiri language so it could have been easily replaced by Persian. At the same time the local fanatics would have remained strictly committed to the use of Sanskrit. This situation would have effected a division of Kashmir on a linguistic pattern—the Persian belt for Muslims and the Sanskrit belt for Hindus. It may be deemed an exaggerated view but at least there were imminent chances which would have created two different dialects out of the same Kashmiri language.

In this background it was the Sheikh who emerged as the saviour of this language. He on the one hand wrote Sanskritised Kashmiri poems to demonstrate his control over the language and on the other made a logical blending of Persian with the spoken language and literature. He not only introduced the poetic genres of Persian literature but also coined metaphors, phrases and similes akin to those of Persian language or even borrowed acceptable words and phrases from it. Thus he saved Kashmiri from extinction and enriched it with progressive literary forms and added vocabulary.

Lal Ded had sung hymns in the local language, but she did not have the capacity to save it from compulsions of the time. Besides it was not possible for any individual, whatever his or her status, to contain the tide of this influence. Hence she had said to the mother of the Sheikh, "Let thee take care of my

spiritual heir." To carry the mission ahead the Sheikh formed a well-knit organisation to save the cultural heritage of Kashmir.

Secondly, it has been pointed out more than once that the richer culture of Iran was dominant and there was the fear of extinction of the Kashmiri cultural traditions. The Sheikh organised a cadre of disciplined Reshis who maintained and popularised local traditions. It should not be construed from this that the Reshis were against progress or represented the forces of status quo or acted contrary to the main purpose of the missionaries but they accepted progressive ideas, propagated and acted in a manner which motivated even the state to consolidate the results of the cultural revolution and its progressive impact on acceptable traditions. Needless to say that the missionaries and Reshis had the common aim of propagation of Islam. However, the efforts of foreign missionaries consciously or unconsciously paved the way for adoption of Iranian or Central Asian culture in Kashmir. Thus the Reshi saints while joining hands with the missionaries for establishing the tradition of Islam also struggled to retain the local character and colour of the new culture.

Thirdly, there was potential danger to communal harmony due to the emergence of the careerist element as a political force. Both the self-centred Brahmin and the selfish Mullah worked hand in glove as agents of the forces of reaction. Consequently a rift was being created between the communities who had inherited a common culture and had even deeper social relationship with each other.

The Sheikh himself rose against such forces and preached communal harmony. His sincerity of purpose becomes clear from the following verse:

Why this hatred, Oh My Lord,
Between the two children from the same parents?
How shall the Lord be pleased
Both with Hindus and Mussalmans?

The Sheikh in a long devotional poem entitled "Bless me, My Lord, with the same generosity", seeks from his Lord the same spiritual status which was bestowed upon Lal Ded¹ and the mute girl² of Bhavan village or upon Sidha Vanu³ etc. This

^{1, 2, 3} All the three are Hindus.

poem became so popular that it is till today recited with devotion in mosques and other Muslim shrines. Thus probably Kashmir is the only place in the Islamic world where names of Hindu saints are recited with reverence and devotion in mosques and shrines.

The Sheikh's disciples and members of his organisation created the mental and emotional basis for a God-fearing society full of communal harmony. This later on became a significant and well-recognised characteristic of Kashmiri thinking and thus even during the most challenging communal¹ frenzy Kashmir became a laboratory of secular ideas.

All these facts reveal that the Sheikh was the first mass leader of Kashmir who on the basis of local values established a composite culture of tolerance having unimpeachable faith in moral values. He protected the Kashmiri language from the danger of extinction and widened its colloquial sphere. He symbolised in his movement the values peculiar to Kashmir and preserved its identity and unity. In this background the nation devised the most appropriate epithet of "Alamdari Kashmir" for him.

This title has a metaphysical explanation also. It is believed that the Kashmiris as a nation will be led by the Sheikh on the day of resurrection.

Sehajanand

The word "Sehaj" (bliss) became synonymous with spiritual contentment with the development of Buddhist philosophy and thus it got a place in both religious and philosophical lexicons of Kashmir.

At the time of the Sheikh's birth, though the Buddhist society had crumbled the effects of its teachings were fresh and manifestly evident in the socio-religious life of Kashmir. The Sheikh was himself influenced by Buddhist philosophy as is evident from his practices. He shunned fresh vegetables lest he hurt a living thing. He would prepare soup only from fallen leaves of vegetables.

In a few manuscripts of "Rauztur Raiz" Baba Khalil has

¹During the partition of the country in 1947.

recorded that "the Sheikh had written a long poem entitled 'Buddha Charit'. This learned author has translated 'Buddha Charit' as 'Wise Saying'." Baba Khalil was misled by the literal meaning of the word "Bauddh" (a Kashmiri word) which means wisdom. In reality it must be a poem eulogising Lord Buddha. In another long devotional poem the poet pays tribute to Lord Buddha as:—

The blissful, blessed with eternal bliss,
Had endless meditation to his credit.
He abandoned both time and riches.
Oh, My Lord, bestow me with the same generosity.

Under the influence of Buddhist philosophy he used many words and phrases which were peculiar only to Buddhism and one such word, commonly used by him, is "Sehaj". He even changed the connotation of this word and made it part of Sufistic phraseology. Praising Prophet Mohammad in a verse he says:

Oh my God, Thou hast cleared the vision of our
Prophet.
By revealing upon him the Sehaj (blissful) Quran.

The Hindus of Kashmir in spite of their belief in Shaivism had utmost respect for Lord Buddha and so considered the Sheikh as Buddha-incarnate and with love and reverence called him "Sehajanand". This epithet further became popular due to the role which he played as a saviour of the Hindu community.

Disciples

As stated earlier the Sheikh enrolled hundreds of Reshis in his order and consolidated its base throughout the state with a well-knit hardcore of workers. They included both men and women several of whom made notable contributions to Kashmiri literature. Many of them were so famous that they recruited independent cadres of disciples to carry out the mission of their leader.

After his death four of his prominent disciples headed the movement one after the other. They are also called Khalifas (Caliphs) of the Sheikh.

Baba Bam-ud-Din

Sadra after plucking the rose bunch from the Khai spring conceived and after nine months gave birth to the Sheikh. The wife of the Sadhu reached the spring after Sadra. She plucked the bunch of lilies, inhaled its fragrance, conceived and gave birth to a son who became a devoted Yogi, retired from the world and spent an ascetic's life in a cave at Bumazowa village in the Mattan area of Anantnag district. This cave was also known as the Cave of Ari Rai.

The Sadhu must have taken birth in the year 1377-78. It is not known when he left his birth-place Khajogipora, but we certainly know that he had attained spiritual eminence to such an extent that he would supervise from the early hours of the morning to sunrise all the major temples situated on the banks of the Jhelum. In a detailed discourse the Sheikh and the Sadhu put forth each other's religious viewpoints, performed miracles and tested each other's spiritual prowess. Finally the Sadhu joined the galaxy of the Sheikh's disciples and was converted to Islam. He was given the name of Bam-ud-Din.

After the death of the Sheikh, Bam-ud-Din led the Reshi movement for two years. He died in the same cave at Bumazowa where he had spent his life in meditation and where he had established the central headquarters of the movement in 1438. On his death which occurred during the night intervening 14th and 15th Ramzan 844 A.H. (A.D. 1440), his junior comrade Zain-ud-Din who was then in the far-flung area of Ladakh returned. He performed the last rites of Baba Sahib and again left for the frontier area.

The disciples of Baba Bam-ud-Din were the great Reshi saints including Baba Rajab-Din, Baba Shakur-ud-Din, Fakhur-ud-Din, Saboor-ud-Din, Hanief-ud-Din and Baba Shams-ud-Din. Certain couplets in Kashmiri are attributed to him but his impact as a poet is negligible.

Zain-ud-Din Wali

It has been stated in what circumstances Zai Singh (Jai Singh) of the remote area of Palmed in Kishtwar came under the influence of the Sheikh, was converted to Islam, named as Zain-ud-Din and assigned the charge of an independent Reshi centre in Dachen *pargana*. The specific place was Aish, now called Aish Muqam.

It has also been stated that he was exiled from the valley under orders of Sultan Zainulabidin and spent two years in exile roaming in Tibet. After the death of Bam-ud-Din the Reshis declared the Khilafat of Zain-ud-Din. Considering the consequences, the Sultan took immediate steps to revoke his expulsion order and issued a decree asking him to return. He was accorded a warm reception both by the people and the government. He took charge of Khilafat in 1440. Describing the experiences of his days in exile he says:

In this biting cold,
To warm my benumbed hands
I consumed the warmth of my breath;
To quench my thirst
In this dry wasteland,
I had to rub my tongue upon my lips.
My ears have frozen in this pervading cold.

To acquire the distinctive Reshi title
 We left our homeland,
 Faced vicissitudes and troubles.
 Bad days are in stock for us.

After leading the movement for eight years with dash and drive Zain-ud-Din Wali died in 852 A.H. (A.D. 1448). Before his death he had expressed a wish that none should enter his cave. On the third day when his disciples went inside they found neither Zain-ud-Din's body nor any sign of his burial. The disciples wept bitterly and searched in and around the dark cave. Finally the Baba informed a disciple in a dream about his grave and a place was located upon which a shrine was built.

Famous among his disciples are Baba Shams-ud-Din, Pami Reshi, Darya Din and others.

Though only a few quatrains have been composed by the Zain they are good pieces of poetry, both in art and thought.

Baba Lateef-ud-Din

The third Khalifa Lateef-ud-Din was the ruler of the tiny state of Madew Wadwan. He came under the influence of the Sheikh at Mukhta Pukri and had to give up his kingdom but to rule the hearts of the people as the third Khalifa. This contact developed into deep intimacy and finally Ladi Raina gave up his kingdom, embraced Islam and remained at the service of the Sheikh. After the death of Zain-ud-Din the leadership of the movement was entrusted to him. He guided it from his own centres "Waterhail"¹ and "Pushkar"². He died at Pushkar where he lies buried and his shrine is revered and respected by all. Many of his disciples also attained fame and public recognition.

Baba Nassar-ud-Din

"Wo'ther" (the stout), as his original name was, had developed serious stomach trouble during his youth which brought him to the Sheikh's cave to seek his blessings. He later recovered and remained at the service of the Sheikh. He served his mentor with zeal and devotion. The Sheikh could not tolerate a

^{1,2}Both villages situated in District Budgam of Kashmir Valley.

moment's separation from Nassar. A maximum number of the Sheikh's verses have been addressed to him. Immediately after the death of the Sheikh Nassar took charge of his headquarters at Tsrar. Though he was virtually the leader of the movement it was he who managed the nomination of Bam-ud-Din, Zain-ud-Din and Lateef-ud-Din as his predecessors and thus took the reins of leadership only after the demise of these senior comrades.

The leadership of the movement passed on to Nassar's disciples after his death and the charge of the main Reshi centre at Tsrar, including the management of the Sheikh's shrine, exclusively remained within the Reshi line of Baba Nassar.

Baba Nassar was himself a good poet. His verses are recorded in *Reshi Namas*. It was he who introduced the poetic innovation of writing *Qita Tarikh* in Kashmiri. The first such *qita* was composed by him on the death of the Sheikh. From the last line of this *qita* (as it is available now) the year of the Sheikh's death is derived.

Nassar died in 1451 and was buried in the very shrine where his master is buried. A good number of quatrains of Baba Sahib are preserved in *Noor Namas* but some have got mixed with the verses of his teacher. He composed in the diction of his master verses replete with thoughts of wisdom.

Simplicity and flow are the main characteristics of his poetry. Here are some samples:

(1)

Useless is a walnut for a toothless infirm,
Useless are bow and arrow for a crippled man,
Useless is a diamond necklace around the neck of
a dog,
And a beautiful lady has no attraction for a blind man.

(2)

I shall demand from my active limbs,
These arms and legs shall fulfil my desires.
Alas! When they suddenly shall cease to obey orders,
From whom shall I demand, who will give me?

(3)

The crown of distinction shall adorn the head of a
 Who feeds his family and meditates simultaneously,
 Our Prophet is loved by all,
 In spite of his dedication to his Lord.
 He lived a social life, full of activity.
 One who lives a strictly socio-material life
 But is overawed by the dreadful fear of hell.
 He alone shall reach the cherished goal of eternal love.

In a *shruk* the Sheikh has praised his four disciples as follows:

Bumah, Nassar, Baba Zaino,
Obedient Lateef-ud-Din.
I have knit these gems in a single thread.
My Lord adorned me with a necklace of four
diamonds.
These four are my asset and I am for them.

At another place he says about Bam-ud-Din:

Buma Sadhu of Bumazowa village
Who spent his life in idol worship,
You, My Lord, invited him to Thy path,
Bestow upon me the same blessing.

For Zain-ud-Din, in the same poem, the Sheikh says:

My Zain distributes the water of life,
He really went ahead of his Guru.
My Lord, bestow upon me the same blessing.

The disciples of the Sheikh included foreigners like Syed Ghulam Din and Syed Ali of Balakh (now buried at Pakharpora). From among the local Ulemas, Sharief Ashwar, Mulla Pir Baz and Qazi Sadr-ud-Din became his disciples. Among the leading Brahmin Sadhus, besides Baba Bam-ud-Din, great scholars like Kati Pandit (later Outb-ud-Din) and Tuli Raina joined his order.

Among his women disciples three attained great fame. Shyam Maji is the second great woman poet of Kashmir after

Lal Ded. She wrote the first elegy in Kashmiri. The verses which she sang in separation of her beloved master, after the death of the latter, are very akin to *ghazal* in pathos, similes, metaphors and content.

His two other women disciples Duhāt and Buhāt actively participated in the spiritual summit between the Sheikh and Mir Mohammad at "Zalus".

A National Hero

The popularity which Sheikh Noor-ud-Din commanded during his lifetime and after goes with only a national hero. His multidimensional personality was loved by people belonging to all religions and sects. All Kashmiris recognise him as the Alamdar of Kashmir. Muslims particularly call him Sheikh-ul-Aalam and to Hindus he is Sehajanand. The unfortunate Shia-Sunni feuds which were the rule of the day during the Chak period did not affect the Sheikh's unbounded popularity among both these sects. It was the Shia king, Sultan Ali Shah Chak (1570-78), who constructed a magnificent verandah of carved *deodar* wood around the shrine of the Sheikh.

It is said that Mother Sadra complained to Shahi Hamdan during her pregnancy about the pain felt by her in her abdomen while kneeling for prayers. The Shah is reported to have advised her to offer prayers facing towards the east as the child in her womb was also punctually offering five prayers a day. Sadra was in the family way during the year 1376-77 whereas the facts show that Shahi Hamdan was not in Kashmir during that period. Hence such incidents are part of legend.

There are several anecdotes similarly connected with his life but they are either part of legend or folk. Owing to the love and reverence which the people had for him, the Sheikh became the central theme of folklore. He is probably the only person around whom the bulk of Kashmiri folklore revolves in one form or the other.

"Zeani Nama" (story of birth) is a lengthy folk song which describes the pre-birth and post-birth miracles of the Sheikh. The impact of Tsrara Braswar (Thursday fair at Tsrar) is another popular theme of Kashmiri folklore.

His verses dominate the entire socio-religious sphere of Kashmir. Singers begin their musical concerts with his *shrugs*

religious preachers recite his verses from the pulpit and leaders from the political platform. Disgusted by the soaring prices of necessities of life housewife quotes a verse of the Sheikh:

The fuel shall become scarce like sandalwood,
Salt shall be costlier than sugar extracts,
Edible oil more precious than perfumes.

A pious old lady shaken by the immorality in society, in grief and with pathos quotes the wise saying of her hero:

Bad days are ahead
When the autumn crop shall ripen simultaneously
with the spring crop,
When both mother and daughter shall leave home
hand in glove,
And spend day and night with strangers.

Disappointed with the so-called democratic rulers the people recite what the Sheikh had five hundred years earlier aptly remarked:

The source fountains shall dry up,
The street gutters shall flow brimful,
And then monkeys shall rule the country.

Whenever any proverb or a wise saying is quoted from Kashmiri language its authorship is attributed to the Sheikh. Though numerous proverbs have been derived from his verses and coined as such, all are not so. This shows the impact of his personality. Any leader, preacher or reformist who comes with something revolutionary or with any reformative measures has to take refuge under the popular umbrella of the Sheikh.

During the 19th century too much of a shrine-adoring mentality crept into the Muslim society of Kashmir. Reformative and orthodox religious preachers however criticised extremism in such practices. They even dubbed such practices as idolatory. To popularise their viewpoint they also devised a saying in the pattern of the Sheikh's *shruk* and attributed its authorship to him:

Mo kar astana astana, Kar tee ye kur astana waali

Do not go from shrine to shrine, do what the man
buried in the shrine had done.

Some Shias have coined the following verse in the style of the Sheikh and attributed it to him:

Aalan trawith waalan naman

(They shall keep dearer his "relics" than the family members of the Prophet).

In 1931 when Sheikh Abdullah challenged the atrocities of the autocratic Dogra Maharaja the people considered his boldness as something of a miracle and to build the cult of his personality they made up couplet in the style and diction of Nund Rishi which is even now being attributed to Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. It reads:

Zainageri aab pheri,
Sowri manza laal neri.

(A diamond will glisten from Soura village at the same time when Zainagir will get irrigated.)

Soura is the birthplace of the late Sheikh Abdullah. It was said that the Zainagir area in district Baramulla was provided irrigation facilities during the days when this leader was born.

No other saint, king, scholar or politician of Kashmir has received such national admiration as Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. Volumes have been written exclusively on his personality and movement in the Persian language. Later poets of Kashmir wrote hundreds of poems eulogising the Sheikh. They have even followed the themes from his verses. Many poems were written in the style and pattern of the Sheikh by many of his successors in the field of letters.

As mentioned earlier Mirza Haider Doughlat and Emperor Akbar also consolidated their rule in Kashmir by attributing their acts of aggression to the "spiritual desires" of the Sheikh. Both devised stories of having in a dream seen a saintly figure

who gave them his name as Noor-ud-Din and directed them to save his people from sectarian misrule. Lala Sukh Jeewan Mal and Atta Mohammad Khan, two Afghan governors, also derived the people's sanction for their acts of cessation by exploitation of the popularity of the Sheikh. The latter even struck coins in his name.

The Sheikh is the first dignitary of Kashmir whose sixth birth centenary was celebrated on both mass and state levels.

The Sheikh toured the valley thrice during his lifetime and made certain observations about some *parganas* or villages. These sayings are so close to the folk that in spite of their antiquity they still sound fresh and are considered apt and appropriate even today. Even if such comments contain some adverse remarks about the inhabitants of some locality the latter still feel proud of such sayings of their hero.

It has also been mentioned earlier that every second village in Kashmir has some memorial or shrine of this great son of the soil. It may be added here that people in almost every village connect at least a spring, a chinar tree or an elevated place with his memory. Many caves are revered as places where he meditated. Shrines have been built on the graves of his parents, wife, children, father-in-law and brothers-in-law. A memorial has come up even on the grave of the barber who shaved his head.

The state forest department, to help preservation of the forest wealth, has adopted the following verse of the Sheikh as its motto:

Ann poshi, Wan poshi

Food is subservient to forests

The late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, quoted this verse in an address she delivered in Italy in 1980. The following verse of the Sheikh needs to be engraved on the gate of every court of justice:

Krayi Khota boud insaf

Justice is superior to meditation

The Poet 'Nund'

There is no denying the fact that the Sheikh was the saviour of the Kashmiri language and opened new horizons of its literary activity. He added new phrases and metaphors, retained its local colour and Sanskrit flavour but skilfully blended it with the sweet fragrance of Persian literature. He fitted in it Persian similes and literary symbols, adopted metres from Persian prosody and introduced poetic beauties of the richer Persian literature.

The late Abdul Ahad Azad¹ (1903-1948) has aptly remarked: "that the poetry of Lal Ded and the Sheikh cannot be treated as the beginning of a literary era but should be deemed a matured conclusion of high literary traditions." However, he too had little access to the poetry of the Sheikh because the manuscripts of Noor Namas were closely and jealously guarded by the Mujawris of Tsrar and other Pir families. Baba Nasib who had a deep study of mystic literature both in Arabic and Persian languages derived more satisfaction and contentment out of the study of verses of the Sheikh than no other book used to give him.

The author of *Asrarul Abrar*², Baba Mishkati, while referring to the impact which the Sheikh's verse left on his revered teacher, Baba Nasib, says: "When he (Nasib) had the occasion to listen to some or any verses of the Sheikh he was terribly moved and would weep so bitterly that his collar would become wet with tears."

"*Wakh*" and "*Watsum*" were two dominant literary forms before Lal and the Sheikh. The names of both these genres find mention in a *Wakh* of Lal. She expressed her innermost mystic

¹Kashmiri Zaban Aur Shairi (Urdu).

²Manuscript Personal.

experiences in *Wakh* form which for its precision and brevity was suited to the expression of intricate feelings. On the other hand to the Sheikh poetry was not merely a mode of expressing one's feelings and experiences but an effective vehicle to communicate, and impress the viewpoint of the poet to his audiences. The Sheikh was a committed poet—committed to his cause. His mission was of primary importance to him and then came poetic beauty. To him the dearest principles were propagation of *Tawhid* (Monotheism) and Omnipresence of God. Suppression of hatred, jealousy, greed, lust and anger was the crux of his discipline. To respect human values, to protect living being and to have unshakeable faith that we all are accountable for our deeds in the world hereafter were principles dearer to him than anything else.

For these ideals he had surrendered social contacts, abandoned worldly pleasures and had thrown himself into a world of miseries, vicissitudes, hunger and thirst. One who devotes his whole life to these high ideals would not compose verses purely for his pleasure or for the pleasure of others.

Hence the Sheikh could not confine himself to smaller genres like *Wakh* and composed the bulk of his poetry in *Watsum* form. Besides, he composed a number of poems which, both in form and content, appear modern. He has composed *qitas* (quatrains) and some verses are in *mathnavi* form as well.

The Sheikh's verses are called *Shruk*, the Kashmiri form of "sloke" (Sanskrit) which means wise sayings. Unfortunately in recent times *Shruk* has been clubbed with some poetic form akin to *Wakh* or quatrain. The position is not correct. *Shruk* must not be considered a separate poetic form. It includes all the verses of the Sheikh whatever their distinctive form.

The Sheikh himself used the word *Sloke* or *Shruk* for Hadis (sayings of Prophet Mohammad):

Kan thaw shrukan beyi Quranas
Tee bayi lagi panas soeti.

Listen carefully to the Quran and Hadis. Therein lies
your salvation.

With deeper infiltration of the technical words of Muslim juris-

prudence into Kashmiri the use of the word "Hadis" (for sayings of Prophet) acquired currency in this language. Consequently the usage of *Shruk* for Hadis became obsolete and instead this word was used only for the "wise sayings of the Sheikh".

Anthologists have termed *Shruk* as *Showk* which means to moan or lament. Thus whatever be its meaning, the term is conceptual rather than technical. It, therefore, qualifies distinctively all the verses of the Sheikh irrespective of their form.

Watsun is the oldest genre of Kashmiri poetry. Though we have no sample of the pre-Sheikh *Watsun* it is inferred both from his poetry and the verses of Lal Ded that this form was in vogue earlier. What was the form of pre-Sheikh *Watsun* is not known to us. The earliest sample available is from the Sheikh's poetry itself. From a study of *Watsun* poems of the Sheikh and later pieces written in this form the following characteristics of this genre do emerge:

- (a) It is a lengthy poem with a continuous theme or each stanza dealing with a separately distinguishable theme or idea.
- (b) Each stanza consists of four verses composed in smaller metre and the fourth verse of every stanza is the refrain.
- (c) This genre is very close to both *geet* and *Ghazal*. When in its content, flow and diction a *Watsun* gives expression to simple ideas and comes close to a folk song, it is purely a *geet*. But when the *Watsun* contains high ideas like pangs of separation, intricacies of human nature, purpose of life, origin and destination of man and the relationship between man and his creator, it comes within the fold of *Ghazal*.

When we consider the form and content of the Sheikh's *Watsun* we find that many of them are purely devotional poems, with continuity in theme but a good number of them can be termed as samples of our earliest *Ghazals*. "Gongul Nama" provides an example. In this continuous *Ghazal* the poet makes skilful use of symbols like tilling, sowing, curbing the growth of wild grass, reaping, thrashing, storing and other auxiliary functions which a tiller has to perform until the agents of the landlord come and sift the grain from the chaff, store the bulk

of the grain and seal the doors of the storehouse. All these symbols borrowed from the profession of agriculture have more than their literal and metaphorical meaning. Each of them has a multi-dimensional connotation. The fourth line repeats itself as refrain in each stanza which reads:

Yus kari gongul, sui kari kraw.

(Whosoever takes pains in the early spring enjoys in the long run).

On the pattern, style and diction of this and other *ghazals* of the Sheikh, generations of Sufi poets expressed the most intricate mystic experiences. Same *Watsun* was used by Habba Khatoon, queen poetess of the sixteenth century, and Mahmood Gami (1765-1855) to express the pleasure of love, pangs of separation, sweet experiences of the charming union and pathos. Later on Rasul Mir (d. 1894) brought *Watsun* so close to *Ghazal* that even the thin boundary line between the two forms disappeared. In the first half of the present century, Mahjoor (1887-1952) and Azad (1903-1948) could not decipher any difference between the two and introduced many new trends in its theme.

Thus *Watsun* is the earliest form of Kashmiri *Ghazal* which after five centuries reached the present stage where a caravan of poets, on the basis of its rich tradition, has found it an appropriate vehicle to communicate the complexities of modern sensibility.

Quatrains

The bulk of the Sheikh's verses consists of smaller poems like quatrains, rhythmic in form and giving expression to a single or connected theme. It is these quatrains or other smaller poems which are strictly called "Sheikh's Shruk" (Stokes of the Sheikh). It may be stated here that the common people have memorised many of these quatrains and usually quote them on appropriate occasions as sayings of the wise man.

Poems

As mentioned earlier the Sheikh composed a good number of poems, both long and small, with or without a title. There are a few poems in which the line of the refrain has been used as the title. They include Munajats (prayer poems), poem addressed to dansues Yawan Mats and the poem describing the backwardness of hilly (Kandi) areas.

In Munajats the Sheikh does not only pray for his salvation or for the betterment of society but also unfolds the socio-religious history of his time.

In the poem addressed to the dancer "Yawan Mats" he gives symbolic expression to his spiritual thinking. In another poem he depicts the plight of the people living in Kandi areas and simultaneously describes the beauty of its surroundings.

In other smaller poems consisting of eight or ten lines with or without refrain, he explains the delicacy of his inner experiences, conveys the spirit of his message or warns the reader of the consequences of ignoring the essence of time.

"*Naat*" is a specific poetic form especially eulogising Prophet Mohammad. Originally, the *Qasida* (panegyric) which expressed poet's love, dedication and emotional attachment with the Prophet was called *naat* but many Persian poets conveyed reverence and feelings of love for the Prophet in *Ghazal* form. Now in both Persian and Urdu literature the same poetic genre has become popular. This trend left a deep-rooted influence on Kashmiri as well. An auspicious beginning was made by the Sheikh. He is the first *naat* composer in Kashmiri. His *naat* is neither in *qasida* nor *ghazal* form nor even in *Watsun* form. They are either quatrains or smaller poems.

"*Mathnavi*" is one of the oldest forms of Persian poetry and it dominated the Persian-speaking world for centuries. Urdu and Kashmiri literature also have masterpieces in this genre. Though its formal start in Kashmiri literature is attributed to the nineteenth century poets, Prakash Bhat and Mahmood Gami, it can be said without hesitation that the earliest sample of *mathnavi* is provided by a good number of verses contained in the Sheikh's famous poem "Hundred-thirty questions and answers".

Poetic forms have been briefly stated which were introduced by the Sheikh under the influence of Persian literature. He, how-

ever, revolutionised the local traditional *Watsun* and introduced smaller poems both descriptive and idealistic as an original literary thinker would do. We cannot attribute composition of such poems to any of the influences local or foreign.

At the same time the Sheikh popularised hundreds of Persian words, phrases and similes. The compilers of his poetry have clubbed his Sanskritised verses under the title of "Sanskriti" or "Pundti". At the same time we find some poems (especially describing Paradise) overburdened with Persian words.

The thought content of his poetry may be divided into the following broad categories:

(a) Devotional poetry (b) *naat*, (c) mortality, (d) monotheism (e) life after death, (f) accountability of worldly deeds in the other world (g) Ethical poetry (h) religious (Islamic) poetry, (i) love for the humanity (j) communal harmony, (k) lyricism, (l) descriptive, and (m) satire and sarcasm.

However, the Sheikh being a saint most of his poetry naturally revolve around the themes of love for his creator and devotion to him. There are numerous detailed poems and hundreds of quatrains in which he praises the Lord, details the blessings which He has bestowed upon His creatures, His attributes, the mercy with which He treats His servants, His Omnipresence, etc. He has spent every moment of his life in prayer, meditation and service of his Lord but expresses his humility in these lines!

Hundred prayers I offered throughout the day,
For the full night I awoke to pray and meditate.
If He does not accept my humble bit,
All my chantings shall prove the wanderings of a
street dog.

To the poet this Creator is Himself the essence of everything which He created and each thing He created is His manifestation.

Thou art the essence of what Thee created,
Thou art the beauty behind thy beautiful
manifestation,
Thou art the model upon which Thee created this
universe,
Soundlessly echoes Thy sound in every sound,
And Thou art immune to vice or virtue.

He has created everything remarkable or minor and the skill of His creation is the main theme of the poet:

Hard and rough cane feeds sugar and bee feeds honey,
The crippled bush produces delicious and sweet
grapes,
Bravo! Thy art and skill, Oh My Lord,
Thou hast bestowed the deer of the desert with the
gift of musk.

The poet is devoted, obedient and has surrendered himself to His will and defines the real servant of God in this couplet:

One who does not put any shield to His arrows
And does not hesitate to face His sword's thrust,
Who treats sweet all the curses which befall from Him,
He only shall get success in both the worlds.

In another prayer poem he has made various references to local saints, mainly Hindus. They were his predecessors or contemporaries. No historical material is otherwise available about many of them and so these poems are of immense value to a student of History. Pir Hassan Shah Khoihami has most probably based his account on Reshis in the third volume of his history upon the material contained in such poems of the Sheikh.

The poet has prayed to achieve the same spiritual status which his predecessor local saints enjoyed in the realm of spirituality. These poems have become part of daily prayers in Muslim mosques and shrines and thus he has removed the barriers of prejudice between the two communities. An atmosphere of mutual love and respect was deeply based and established:

To that Lal Ded of Padmanpora
Who took the divine nectar in abundance,
She, the great Yogini, lulled saints in her lap,
Bestow me, My Lord, with the same grace.

The dumb girl of a petty village
Who quenched the thirst of the thirsty.

Flew in high heavens with her pet birds,
Bestow me, My Lord, with the same grace.

A dumb and mute Hindu girl of Bhavan¹ carried pitchers of water to the village situated upon a hilltop, and would receive remuneration for the day's labour in kind. The same foodstuff she would give to birds and would herself starve. Her Lord was so much pleased with her that she was bestowed with the power to fly with the same flock of birds.

In another poem he has supplied the posterity with precise but valuable information about eminent Reshi saints of Kashmir who had lived in oblivion and obscurity:

The Zalka Reshi of Dandakvana,
Who lived on the bitter soup of wild herbs,
These Reshis are really blessed,
Be pleased, my Lord, with Thy servants.

He has in the same and other poems provided us some material about Plas Reshi, Miran Reshi, Yasman Reshi, Plasman and Khalasman Reshis.

In many other similar poems the poet has described his devotion for his Creator, the accountability of his deeds in the world hereafter, the blessings with which God has bestowed the universe, the fear of the day of resurrection, the dreadful terror of hell and the pleasures of paradise.

The Sheikh is a devoted and dedicated lover of Prophet Mohammad. According to him salvation in both worlds is a guaranteed pleasure for one who strictly follows the footsteps of the Prophet in both letter and spirit. He has in brief and simple words summed up the real purport of Islam in this quatrain:

Believe in and have unshakeable faith,
That the path trodden by the Prophet and his four
Caliphs,
Is the only path of Truth,
Their deeds are Thy key to solve worldly problems.
If Thou follow them in letter and spirit,
Thou shall be happier in both the worlds.

¹Bhavan, a village in Southern Kashmir.

In another quatrain the deep devotional and sentimental love for the Prophet is described by the poet with emotional sincerity but with artistic force:

Oh wise, give up the path of paganism,
Follow the righteous path of truth,
Our misdeeds shall drag us to fire,
But the severe punishment than that,
Is the distress to which, will be subjected
Our beloved Prophet Mohammad
Before his Lord, on the day of judgment.

Here the poet considers the distress of the Prophet more severe punishment than the torments of hell. In a quatrain with a similar theme the twentieth century Urdu poet, Iqbal, requested his Lord to keep the balance-sheet of his actions hidden from his beloved Prophet even if it becomes inevitable to expose the same on the day of resurrection.

Though this quatrain of the Sheikh cannot match in poetic delicacy to that of Iqbal but the former is more sentimental than the latter in both expression and dedication.

His love for the family members of the Prophet is manifestly evident from this poem:

(Great and exalted is the status of daughter)
The daughter was born to Prophet Mohammad,
Whose birth conferred upon this universe glamour
and grace,
She got married to the sovereign king of spirituality,
She gave birth to two illustrious sons,
Be sure she will plead our cause on the day of
judgment.
Had not she taken birth this world would have
crumbled in agony.

The Sheikh's poetry is commonly known as Ka'shur Quran (The Kashmiri Quran). This is because the themes of his quatrains and poems revolve around some or the other verse of the Quran. That is also why his verse was given the name "Shruk" which he had himself used as Kashmiri equivalent

for Hadith. The Quran stressed upon Tawheed (monotheism), strict adherence to righteous path, regularly offering five prayers a day, yearly payment of Zakat and pilgrimage of Haj. The Quran further teaches a Muslim to obey the dictates of the Creator, to believe in His omnipresence, to love and serve the humanity etc. These all are the themes of the Sheikh's poems.

God is one, He has not taken birth from anyone nor has anyone taken birth from Him but His attributes and dimensions are numberless:

It is He who plays the gimmicks of "Assertion and Denial".

Ceaseless are His activities,
He has decorated His own attributes with His manifestation,

Immune is my Lord to birth and death,
He has conferred distinction upon human beings,
Understand this secret if thou are wise enough,
Thou shalt see everything in thyself, if thee realise,
He is over and above hunger and sleep.
One who does not understand these realities,
No difference day and night make to a blind man.

The one and the only one is my God,
Has a million attributes and names,
Not even a blade of grass can afford to live
Without uttering permanently His name,
To one who eagerly waits at His door,
Himself He shall administer the dose of nectar.
All the scenes of this multi-act play are different but
the actor is the same,
The keenest eye alone shall detect this reality.

The poet has always preached that one should remain in constant fear of the Almighty. One who really has unshakeable faith that he is liable to explain his deeds before his Lord and trembles in fear of his Creator, shall consequently follow a righteous path:

Even if thou art a lion, tremble in fear like a jackal,
Don't infringe the bund of religious path,
Thou dost not know swimming, thou hast drowned
thyself near the shore,
Do not make thy being a barrier between thee
and Him.

The Nimaz, according to the Quran, is the discipline which separates one from sin and vice and the Prophet has called it the Meraj (zenith of evolution) for a believer. Hence the Sheikh's verses lay sufficient stress on the strict adherence to this basic discipline of Islam.

Who work hard to earn livelihood and offer Nimaz,
Their coming to this world is meaningful,
They have widest of fields and need to toil ceaselessly,
They shall really reap a rich harvest,
They will cross (the dreadful river) and shall remain
immune to hell,
And their Lord shall treat them with generosity.
So offer regularly five prayers a day.
Kill thy evil self and therein lies Nimaz,
Blend nothingness with the Being of Siva,
And there lies the rich treasure of Nimaz.

The poet has with specific stress described the philosophy of each prayer, viz. morning, midday, afternoon, evening and night prayers, and has laid stress on other optional prayers. To quote each of such verses will make this chapter too lengthy.

In another smaller poem the poet lays stress on offering of Nimaz and observation of fasts during the month of Ramzan:

Oh, the servant of the Lord, love the Nimaz and
Ramzan,
These are keys to thy salvation.
Listen attentively to the verses of the Quran and
Hadis,
Therein lies your valour
This universe has seen more brave people than you,
You, like all of them, shall feel the pangs of death,

Thy kith and kin may for a while
Sit around thee at thy last moment,
They all shall drag you for thy last bath
And simultaneously shall repeat thy shortcomings.
Thy wet corpse shall be wrapped in the coffin
And they shall carry thee to the isolated graveyard,
Thy deeds—good or bad—shall only accompany thee.

Truth is the essence of every religion and it is the foundation of all moral values. Hence the Sheikh has always condemned falsehood;

Like the leaves of a tree, you may tremble while
speaking the truth,
But you will enjoy the fiction in thy falsehood,
You have ignored your Lord and followed the Satan,
Alas! thy fate, thou art really undone.

The Sheikh's poetry is mostly ethical. Moral values are not like laws which carry any sanction but are stronger than codified laws. However their strength lies in the deeper conviction that human acts are subject to scrutiny by some super-human authority which has the keenest knowledge of our minutest secret acts. This conviction is established by the belief that everyone is responsible before such authority and such a situation is to befall without fail upon everyone of us. The belief that one is to account for his deeds and will have to receive reward or punishment, is the basic pillar of the moral structure which the Sheikh's poetry depicts and describes.

The Sheikh has in his verses drawn a horrible picture of the torments of hell and aptly described the pleasures of heaven. He has informed his followers about the severity of punishment and comforts of the heaven:

Do as thou hast promised to do,
Thy deeds shall refresh thy memory,
Which shall become thy shield there.
Die before thy death shall come,
Then alone you will be remembered after thy death.

During the time of the poet Hindu society had already faced devastation due to caste discrimination. As indicated earlier, some Ulemas who were fond of worldly pleasures and official privileges also felt the indirect influence of this local malaise and started an undercurrent division of Muslim society on such a basis. The Sheikh came out vehemently against such social evils. He stressed his viewpoint by elucidations from Islamic conceptual environment:

The Aazar who carved idols all his life,
 Gave birth to a son Abraham
 Who broke those idols into pieces,
 And fought the Holy war against evil,
 Built Kaba with his own hands.
 Royal is the descent of Quraish dynasty,
 Stone-hearted was its condemned son Abu Lahab,
 His own nephew was the last among the prophets
 Abu Jehal (Father of ignorance) died a dog's death,
 Who expelled his own nephew from Mecca.
 Momentary is the base of this universe,
 But immortal are the deeds in His name.

*

The meanest does boast of his descent,
 Alas! He has neither wit nor wisdom.

It has already been stated that the confrontation to which some interested elements had tried to expose the two communities during the time of the Sheikh posed a potential threat to our values. It required timely intervention of some prophetic persuasion. Hence the Sheikh with the miracle of his sweet verse averted the crisis and laid a permanent basis for religious harmony:

Ice, snow, the glacier,
 All the three are water.

*

Two children from the same parents,
 The Muslims and the Hindus.
 Why this gulf of hatred between the two:
 Be pleased with thy servants, oh My Lord.

Predominant in the poetry of the Sheikh are his views against greed, lust, anger and jealousy:

Without the aid of a sailor, I did sail my ship,
By suppression of greed, jealousy, arrogance,
Lust, pride and anger,
Then I realised what I am.

He has titled a poem with the refrain "Arrogance does not befit a Mussalman:"

Arrogance shall destroy thy asset,
Its flames shall consume thy meditation,
Arrogance shall rob thy treasure,
Beware, arrogance does not behove a Mussalman.

Yet in another quatrain he says:

Jealousy, greed, lust and arrogance,
All these are attributes of the flames of hell,
Mohammad has come with salvation for you,
Art thou desirous of salvation, purchase humility from
him.

The Sheikh belonged to such a Sufi cult which considered this world merely a dream, a fantasy and a place of momentary pleasure. Everything of this world (the world in itself) is short-lived.

There are many *watsums* quoted by the editors of Sheikh's poetry under the title of *ghazal* and many of these depict the mortality of the world and worldly pleasures:

(1)

Deceitful is this world
Full of fraud and deception;
Thou art proud of its nothingness;
Thou waste thy growth in feeding thy belly.
At thy arrival thou art jubilant enough,
But thou leave in utter agony and distress;
Alas! this world is full of deceit.

(2)

Deep and dark ditches surround you everywhere,
In shambles this universe does tremble.
Marsh is the shore of this ocean,
Alas! this universe is full of deceit.

(1)

I did not realise the tricks and treachery,
Decorated the edifice with show and lustre,
This world is nothing more than a dream in slumber-
ous sleep.

Let us go home—the game is over.

(2)

The momentary flame of dry reed grass,
Which was spread in the atmosphere by the fast wind,
It is no more now neither flame nor smoke,
In utter secrecy the burglar has robbed me,
Let us go home—the game is over.

(3)

I pinned my hopes in my sons and daughters,
Alas! I have oppressed and depressed myself,
I forget the message of mortality.
Let us go home—the game is over.

In another *ghazal* with the refrain “The blind is lost in bewilderment, how to reach the destination”, the poet says:

(1)

The hoofs of my fast running horse are held up in the
mud and marsh,
Now I repent and weep in loneliness and solitude,
Ruthless has become the evil self, how to control it,
The blind is lost in bewilderment, how to reach the
destination.

(2)

What shall I do with my destiny, the writing on the
wall?
This edifice is shaken, its walls will soon fall,
The very foundation stone is fast eroding,
The blind is lost in bewilderment, how to reach the
destination.

(3)

With what purpose did I come in this age of degradation?
tion?

The situations around have perplexed me,
My diamond of youth is broken into pieces,
The blind is lost in bewilderment, how to reach the
destination.

(4)

The sandalwood of this building has decayed,
How to save myself from the flames of hell,
The blind is lost in bewilderment, how to reach the
destination.

(5)

By robbing and stealing I collected, threw the same to
dogs,

Now I ponder over, repent and weep,
All alone I am accountable for all my deeds,
The blind is lost in bewilderment, how to reach the
destination.

(6)

The charm of my beauty is gone, wrinkles have
dawned upon my cheeks,
Nund Reshi shall beg mercy from his Lord,
The blind is lost in bewilderment, how to reach the
destination.

The Sheikh was the leading Sufi saint of his time and so gave vent to his intricate mystic feelings. "Faqr" (humility) is one of the basic traits of a Sufi:

"Faqr" is defence against His wrath,
The only asset of all the Prophets,
Superior in value and essence to both worlds,
It is the intoxicating fragrance of His rose.

"Faqr" injures the senses and feelings never to heal
up again.
It cuts deeper in the veins and heals the injured ego,
Difficult is to lift its heavy weight,
Upon thin and weak shoulders.

“Love” is the cherished path of a mystic traveller (Salik) and his mad dedication for his Beloved provides him a drive and inspiration. “Ishq” is the contentment of a lover. Its pangs, though very severe, give him immense pleasure. The sufferings, tribulations, troubles and torments which a lover faces in the experience of love are terrible but provide him satisfaction, contentment and spiritual pleasure. Describing its pangs the poet versifies:

Love is the tragic death of a lonely child to a destitute
 mother,
 Can she heave a sigh of relief?
 It is to lie upon the bed of piercing thorns,
 Can one have a wink of sleep?
 It is to throw one's naked body in a beehive,
 Can one have a moment of rest?
 It is to lead the brigade of troops to the war front,
 Can he take a step in retreat?
 It is to wear the red robes dyed in one's own blood,
 Can one afford to lose the honour?
 It is to cross the violent stream with headload on a
 sharp-edged thin bridge path,
 Can one move left or right?
 It is to offer the head to the thrust of naked sword,
 Can one return safe?

In another quatrain Aashiq (lover) is defined thus:

Like the gold shall shine in lustre,
 Within the flames of the burning kiln,
 He is burnt by inner flames of love,
 Shall reach the spaceless destination.

Without any comment here are quoted some quatrains relevant to his mystic expression:

We came here but not know where to go,
 Did never realise the perplexity of crossroads.
 Can we ever persuade Him with mere flattery,
 Who holds our destiny in his grip?

These attractive charming worldly pleasures
Made me dance to their tune.
The Satan did put to fire the heap of my assets.
The chased thief is confused where to escape.

Why, my soul, thou did not choose an opportune
time,
Till thy purity got adulterated?
Death watches keenly, like the fisherman for a fish in
the lake.
And the tenant is liable to vacate the premises.
The "Daal" conferred union between the "Alif" and
"Hai",
The "Hai" annihilated the "Bay",
By closing the six gates of senses in quest of the "Onc"
I achieved union with "Meemless" Ahmad.

Alif, Hai, Daal, Bay and Neem are all letters of the Arabic alphabet. Alif is the symbol of monotheism, Hai is for immortality, Daal for union, Bay for duality and so on. Alif, Hai and Daal form the word "Ahad" which means one. When "M" (Meem) is inserted it becomes Ahmad. In this quatrain the saint-poet hints symbolically at the stages he traversed to reach the destination of the real truth. He attained union by destroying the duality and by realising the oneness and immortality of that real truth. This goal of the "Ultimate One" was realised by him through the benevolence of Mohammad:

I am close to Him
In full contentment I am with my Love,
Uselessly I wandered beyond my Self,
The ultimate solace is within me.

Rhetoric expression and fluent speech hardly attract
Him.
He is moved by one who conditions himself to Him.
Always recites His name but voicelessly.
Thereby the king swan shall fall in Thy web.

He has expressed in simple ideas the experience of his union with Absolute Love. The experience is simple and the path trodden by the poet is straight:

Without using any oars I carried my ship to the shore,
By killing my vanity, greed and lust
With devotion and sincerity I devoured for Him.
And thereby I recognised my Self.

Nimaz sows seeds in thy field.
With thy cultured behaviour its crop shall ripen.
Its growth can't survive without water.
Thy heart should not be left in dryness,
It needs the wet atmosphere of Zikir.
Chisel the diamond of thy self.
Its lustre shall attract the vision of love.

Thoughtfully I explored the Kalima of Mohammad,
My sincere meditation attained union with His Being,
In my being I found the existing Reality,
And saw His manifestation from every side.
The highest stage of contentment is bestowed upon me,
He Himself taught me the intricacies of Shariat.

The origin of knowledge and sciences,
Lies in the connotation of Kalima,
The origin of meditation lies in mortification,
The origin of atmosphere lies within His knowledge,
And the origin of ocean lies within infinity.

There are other numerous poems, quatrains and verses which are replete with mystic expressions, matured advice and saintly experiences.

Quran is the code of conduct for every Muslim. Thus a true and faithful Mussalman models his life strictly in accordance with the principles laid down in it. The Sufis, besides modelling their lives according to Quran, love each of its verses, derive immense spiritual pleasure from its recitation, get the solution of intricate metaphysical problems from the simple but multi-dimensional guidance laid down in it. The impact which a Quari (reader of the Quran) should get from its recitation is summed up by the Sheikh from his own experience thus:

Have not you died while reciting Quran?
And has not its recitation turned you into ashes?
How did you live? You have recited Quran,

the life and temperament of Kashmiris and the socio-political environment which surrounded him.

From times immemorial "Kangri"¹ is an integral and distinguishable feature of Kashmiri culture. It is also a fact that these geographical compulsions always forced a Kashmiri—poor or rich—to possess a shelter of his own. Hence the housebuilding craze is part of our socio-economic life. These facts are evident from this twenty-line poem:

Momentary is the arrival, momentary the departure,
The Kangri I require to warm the chill cold of my
body,
I did construct a multi-storeyed house,
For whom, I have done so?
Mist has fallen upon my eyes and my ears are deaf,
Uselessly I threw mud upon the clear sky
(which in turn fell upon me),
I have deceived myself in this self-imposed accident,
Now I repent but for what use?
On this shore I am restlessly in distress,
And on the other bank I will have to repent too much,
I would fly from this end to that,
But, alas! It is impossible,
Featherless as I am,
Can't even jump a foot above.
I would swim but terrible are the tides of this ocean,
I have shut my eyes, closed my ears,
In this state I made a place to lie over.
All my efforts have been but a futility,
At last I pin my hopes in Thy generosity.

Kashmir is famous for its beauty, intellect, arts and crafts. Its Wazawan is also a distinctive cuisine for its peculiar prepara-

¹A Kangri: firepot of baked clay in a tightfitting wicker jacket. It provides warmth in the cold season and is a permanent companion of a Kashmiri during the winter.

Kangri, house, mud etc. are all symbols used to convey intricate mystic experiences but the poem provides sufficient information about socio-economic life of 14th century Kashmir.

tions and taste. Some have vainly tried to connect the origin of various dishes served in Wazawan to some foreign countries but the verses of the Sheikh provide us the most credible evidence to show that these "varieties" are peculiarly Kashmiri and the institution of the Waza (professional cook) is also as old in Kashmir as other professions. In this poem the poet makes sufficient mention of these mutton varieties:

Rice¹ prepared with seven spices,
Rista² added with flavour of saffron,
With such a type of diet
Even angels shall fall ill,
Qali³, Dopiazza⁴, Methimaz⁵ and Rista,
The saints are not used to such a menu.

From the following quatrain, it is inferred that people were so generously hospitable that they would hire the services of an expert professional cook to serve varied preparations to even an ordinary guest. It is also clear that guests were also given valuable gifts. The inner construction of this quatrain is both symbolic and mystic but its exterior is relevant to the theme presently under discussion:

I visited thy place as a guest,
Thou generously and affectionately treated me.
Thou hast gifted a cow and calf to me,
Conscience is the bride, sensibility the groom,
The mind demands everything it comes across.
Meat and milk preparations have become a wastage,
Let thee become Waza, my entertainer,
I shall be thy guest.
The soul shall soon be separated from the body,
Thou will cease to be my entertainer,
And I shall cease to be thy guest.

Ordinarily we should not expect social awareness from our classics and that too from the Sufi poets of medieval period. This conception is too recent. However, there are certain exceptions

¹ Special rice preparation.

² to ⁵ All mutton preparations served in Wazawan.

and the Sheikh's verses fall within that category. It has been earlier said that the Sheikh was a committed writer. He was committed to develop a society based on moral values free from exploitation and oppression. Hence he directly or indirectly raised his voice against any sort of exploitation and expressed concern at oppression and misery.

There are a few references to his symbolic poem entitled "Gangul Nama". He elucidates the lot of a landless tenant, who alongwith his family members untiringly toils on the land of his lord but when he reaps the harvest agents, collectors, watchers and supervisors of the landlord strictly supervise sharing of produce, sift the grain strictly, harass the tenant on minor pretexts, take the lord's share as a right and grab the tenant's share by various tactics of pressure and persecution. Ultimately what they do to him is hinted at in this stanza:

Thy lord's agents shall declare thy ripened crop as
unripe,
And shall count each grain of thy produce,
Ultimately they shall store, stock and keep the same
under their lock and key.

This poem besides revealing the agrarian set-up of his time, unfolds the inner reaction of the poet against those conditions. It is therefore an indirect expression of his sense of awareness about the strains of socio-economic conditions.

In another poem while describing the topography, geographical environment, social conditions and economic miseries of people living in the Kandi areas, the poet gives vent to his own reaction and feelings. These villages are in close vicinity of forests and so possess a commanding picturesque view but owing to droughts, early snowfall and unripe crops the condition of the people living in these areas is miserable. Here is one stanza quoted from this long poem:

The (poor) women of Kandi area,
Do not possess either headdress or woollen 'pheran'
to wear,
In spite of this they entertain guests,
Their diet consists of barley flour and inferior wild
fruit.

In olden times due to floods, drought, untimely snowfall and early onset of winter, famines were a common occurrence in this happy land. Due to geographical compulsions and lack of means of communication the import of foodstuffs was impossible. In these circumstances even rich people who could afford to spend could not get in return foodgrains to save themselves from starvation. The poet says:

What use is this gold and silver?
Better than all riches is a maund of foodgrains.

His devotion to religious harmony, his reaction to casteism and his tirade against the exploiters of religion, all provide instances of social awareness in the thinking of the poet. Exposing the contradictions of his society he says:

1

Some have stored the various varieties of foodgrains,
Bearing different colours, red or white,
Some do not even possess food for dinner,
Their lonely child begs in streets.

2

At one's door the musicians sing and dance in chorus,
But he in turn is inattentively drowsy,
Alas! The other one is tied, dragged and beaten
mercilessly.

3

One possesses golden sovereign coins in abundance.
Lends money and earns interest on it.
The other is compelled by circumstances to commit
Lurking house trespass to steal things.

Descriptive poetry in Kashmiri developed with the evolution of *masnavi* which took birth in the nineteenth century. But it is an admitted fact that the Sheikh's verses provide us the earliest and best samples of such poetry:

The banks of the streams are decorated by Mantha
plants,
The forests around are ordained by hyacinth,
Fascinating is their fragrance, the visitors pay homage,

The beehives provide white honey in abundance,
 The Kandi areas are so beautiful surely,
 Nuts are cheap produce in Kandi areas,
 In such abundance that bears too can't eat all,
 Its edible kernel produces oil in great quantity.
 These Kandi areas are so beautiful surely.

This type of real description was a poetic rarity in Kashmiri language till the dawn of progressive writers movement in later forties. The *masnavi* writers confined the versified descriptions to imaginary gardens, palaces of the kings of fiction and battles of Rustam but never attempted to describe their own surroundings. The Sheikh, on the other hand, was conscious of his environment even during the medieval age.

In another poem addressed to "Yawan Mats" the famous dancer, the poet has described in a few verses her beauty at the prime of her youth.

Lyricism is a distinguishable characteristic of his poetry. Under the influence of Persian language and literature the Sheikh introduced new forms of prosody, rhymes, rhythms, similes and metaphors. He added musical flavour to Kashmiri poetry. The earliest *ghazal* is found in *Watsun* form in his poem "Gongul Nama", a symbolic continuous *ghazal*. Azad has correctly stated that its boundaries are in close vicinity with the territories of modern *ghazal*¹. While discussing lyricism it is important to refer to such verses which are full of "Taggazul"—the characteristic of a *ghazal*, a wider term than lyric.

Love and romance are common themes of *ghazal* and lyric but former is expressing the experiences of a dejected lover and dives into the depths of metaphysical philosophical and spiritual aspects of life. It touches upon the ambiguities and obscurities of human nature, its origin and its ultimate end. In this background we can qualify the Sheikh's *Watsun* as the foundation of *ghazal*.

(1)

The arrow of Cupid has maddened the beauty,
 My youthful arrogant beloved has fallen in love with
 flowers,

¹*Ghazal : Kashmiri Zaban aur Shairi*, Vol. II, p. 197.

Pangs of separation have melted me like the snow of
high peaks,
The thug has robbed me of everything,
The sweet rice dish has become a chaff preparation,
The time is full of curse and agony.

(2)

God has gifted you with the pangs of love,
Nourish it with the blood of thy veins,
Impossible is to live unless I see my friend,
A friend shall never cease to talk about his friend.
My sixth sense has emerged as I traversed all the six
dense forests,
And my conscience grew out of my forbearance,
I have roasted my heart upon the flames of love.
The love is my beloved and so I keep it always with
me.
With mere breath it cools down,
And with the same breath it regains the warmth again.
His being hangs upon these two breaths.
The lover sacrifices everything for the satisfaction of
his beloved,
The two are inseparable as petals from fragrance,
One who becomes conscious of this vicinity.
Shall really achieve union with his love.

(3)

My friend is not so easily accessible,
So that I can enter a bargain with him,
Alas! He has pierced my heart into pieces
By throwing the blows of sword upon it.
He has thrown burning fire in my naked lap,
I could not even utter a word.
Every part of my body is consumed by its heat.
My heart is full of wounds.

In the following *ghazal* the poet is both mystical and symbolic. The form is neither of Persian *ghazal* nor of Kashmiri *watsun*. It consists of ten stanzas. Each stanza consists of four verses which are in "a, b" form. The first line of each stanza rhymes with the third and the second with the fourth:

Mansoor could not bear
 The manifestation of a particle of His being,
 He uprooted the essence of contentment.
 What an extrovert he has proved!
 A tide out of an ocean was he,
 Did not retain his identity?
 He was nearer to Reality but behaved cheaply,
 Divulged the secret and lost his way.
 He did not end in flames of fire,
 Mystics and lovers wept therefore.
 He was Mansoor (the helped) and so did not die.
 He himself threw his fragrance to dust,
 Got himself whipped and stoned to death
 So as to keep intact the feeble thread of theory.
 He is pride of both mystic and lover,
 How did his innermost secret fall out?
 He himself dismantled the religious bund,
 The secret became public.
 As the beloved did reveal Himself to Mansoor,
 And as He did make him taste the wine of love,
 Got him punished like a thief.
 Out of the ocean a drop he saw,
 Dived into it and got pearls and gems,
 The arrow of love did pierce his chest,
 Tolerated the agony and did achieve his love.
 He washed his body with saffron and camphor,
 Thereafter gifted fragrance to the gallows.
 He provided guidance both to lovers and mystics,
 And thus became famous in this universe.

In this *ghazal* the poet has narrated in different dimensions the commonly known episode of Mansoor and has thus drawn various eternal and truthful conclusions from this single fact. It is unfortunate that this lengthy *ghazal* of ten stanzas with continuity of theme and content has recently been bifurcated into separate quatrains whereas both learned editors of the Sheikh's poetry, viz. Baba Kamal and Baba Khalil, have arrayed all these verses under a single title of "Nazm" (poem).

It will become too lengthy to quote verses relevant to this particular theme. However a few verses from the

poem which he addressed to the dancer Yawan Mats :

You have come like a beautiful nun in a green forest,
Thy wrists are so sweet that they invite a thousand
 kisses,
Now you have decayed like fallen grass,
Thou shall realise, oh mad youth, but alas!

Poetic obscurity is also evident in his verse which may have been noted in the above mentioned *ghazals*.

In another quatrain the Sheikh unfolds a simple and commonly spelt out idea of "Growth and Decay" but he has given in the last verse such a twist which widens the sphere of its connotation. The poet has so sincerely asked his reader to share the impact which was left upon the mind of the poet by a peculiar experience. This last verse makes an ordinary and oft-repeated idea novel and fresh:

The magnificent palaces of rich lords,
Overshadowed the architect of magnificence,
Wherein the beauty sung melodious songs,
And charm did sweep dust with peacock feathers.
Upon the land underneath the same construction
today,
I saw the tillers reaping the cotton crop,
I have seen oh my comrade, let you go and see for
thyself.

In another poem the poet makes a tree to speak in these words.

The tree repents and says:

“Oh, I am marred,
Isolated, deserted, movementless.
Had I been a human being,
I would roam around these meadows
And would have made the world dance to my tune.
But I am not so,
And am thus affixed in wilderness.”

In spite of the fact that the Sheikh used his verse as a tool

to revolutionise society, he at the same time maintained the technicalities of poetry and contributed greatly to the evolution of Kashmiri verse. Hence his verses are all, without exception, examples of the use of poetic beauties. He has originality in similes, tactfully devises new metaphors, coins words and phrases and consciously adds the musical beauties to his verse. To narrate his verses which have acquired currency as proverbs in our language it will need to quote at least one-third of his total poetry. He could play pun in a single word and with such device he adds to the beauty of his verse.

Let the reader note the use of similes and metaphors in this poem:

The fire to warm myself,
Is extinguished in my firepot,
Yet I have not lit the fire in my kitchen,
What to contain now in this firepot (Kangri)?
Ignoring the heaps of corn I have sown the heaps of
filth,
With futility I have spent my energy day and night,
Ignoring the gold and silver,
I purchased the inferior brass.
I broke the shining sword,
Forged sickles out of its molten metal.
In early spring I did sow the crop.
And in late autumn did reap the same.
The sun is set,
I have started to lit my kitchen,
Alas! It is extinguished,
The dinner remained unboiled.

Thou art dancing on a ditch,
How doth thy wisdom allow you to do so?

Diamonds are not found in gutters,
Birds do not sing in the cage,
Narcissus does not blossom upon filthy substances,
And the pearl necklace cannot be had from hawkers
of glassware.

It is very difficult to convey these poetic beauties, similes and

metaphors in other languages. Some of the metaphors coined are:

Worldly pleasures as "inner fire within the heap of dry grass", knowledge as "emanating fragrance", the world of pleasures as "a ditch under cover of grass," human values as "a virgin treasure of diamonds", arrogance as "a fruitless plant", humility as "a plant bent down with the weight of produce", a scholar fond of the world as "a donkey loaded with books," death as "a ferocious tiger" or "a sweet fruit juice", the ultimate reality as "a merchant adorning the market", soul as "a guest", body as "leased premises", youth as "full moon", old age as "a broken wheel", etc.

The Sheikh has very tactfully introduced the poetic innovation of the use of antonyms:

Equality is never possible
Between an "old ass" and the "Arabic horse",
Between a "wooden tub" and a shikara (boat),
Between a "frog" and a "crocodile",
Between the "phoenix" and a "crow".

2

Some are born with virtues and grace,
Who have derived generosity of the ocean from a
petty stream.
Some under the spell of intoxication gaze into the
skies,
Their green fields have been devastated by locusts.
Some have earned huge profits without any invest-
ment,
Some run away under frustration,
Their full shops do not attract a single customer.

Satire full of wit and humour oriented with sharp sarcasm are the distinct qualities of his verse which qualification remained significantly absent in the poetry after him till the later part of the nineteenth century. Mullahs, Brahmins and hypocritic Rishis and Dervishes were the main targets of his satire and sarcasm. In these quatrains both the Mullah and the Brahmin have been ridiculed:

(1)

These talkative Mullahs,
With long dyed beard,
Deceitful is their sweet speech.
They are author-minded liars.

(2)

Mullahs have become merchants of mosques,
The Pandit steals the idols from the temple,
One among thousands of them may deserve salvation,
Others are all the disciples of Satan.

(3)

Mullah is fond of beef and mutton,
Dubs vegetables as rejected grass,
Reluctantly swallows sweet cakes,
But frightens people about mosques by saying:
"Beware, genie do dwell in such places."

(4)

The fat Mullah will run to attend the feast,
Like the leaves of a tree under the pressure of wind,
He will take mutton in plates and soup in bowls,
Any minor deficiency shall invite his displeasure.

In this quatrain Mullahs, Sheikhs and Sufis are clubbed together and collectively exposed:

The Mullah is happy with gifts and feasts,
The Sheikhs are mad after greed and lust,
The Sufis are happy to cheat others,
Their one-time diet is three seers of mutton and a
maund of rice.

The Pandit is ridiculed in this couplet:

The old and infirm Pandit shall search,
A virgin girl as his wife,
Even if he may be very near to his pyre.
He will never prefer a widow as his life partner.

Once Sheikh met a barber who shaved his head but found his knife and scissors rusty. The Sheikh asked

his name and the barber replied, "Sir, my name is Shravana." Shravana corresponds to the month of June. The name indicated youth, prosperity and the zenith of growth.

The month of Poh (corresponding to December-January) is synonymous for old age, acute poverty and nadir of decay. As the barber mentioned his name the Sheikh gazed upon his personality and said:

I travelled with the wind,
The Shravana shaved my head,
Crows have bitten my naked body,
I do not acquire any profit, thou didn't undergo loss,
Let thee lose thy tools,
Oh thou art "Poh" but named as "Shravana".

The poet has used several specific words in different connotations than their literal meaning. Repetition of their use with different meaning at different places has widened the ambit of these words. Literally they have acquired the character of symbols

The poetry of the Sheikh is full of references to historical events and personalities both from the Muslim world and Kashmir. In the like manner he has made quite a good number of references to the ecological intricacies and mythological anecdotes. In the interest of brevity to quote some personalities about whom he off and on makes references. They are Rama of Dandakvana, Arjun's valour, rise and fall of the Pandavas Noah, Khalil, Shadad, Hatim of Tay dynasty, Alexander, Pharoah, Molvi Rumi, Owais of Qarna, Sheikh Barsiya, Sheikh Sana, Suddhe Vano, Sodha Shrikant, Lal Ded and others.

The poetry of the Sheikh is one of the rich sources for us to know much about the socio-cultural life in Kashmir during the fourteenth century. To quote some other verses which illustrate this contention:

The same metal, copper, provides material for all the
three,
All are carved out by the same skilful hand.
The dish plate is destined with sweet dishes,

The rice bowl for 'pulaw',
And the spit bowl is destined with filth of spits.

It is evident from this quatrain that copper utensils were frequently in use during the Sheikh's time and even spit bowls were made of this costly metal. It is also evident from the following quatrains that ceramics were used side by side in households.

Clay my foundation and clay around me,
Clay is within me and clay my destination,
Clay is inseparable part of my being,
And clay utensils to serve me.

Children of even middle class people were brought up by maid servants and wooden decorated cradles were items of necessity those days:

On their birth servants were appointed to play with
their cradles,
And maid servants were appointed to feed them,
On their maturity they became eve-teasers and
womanisers,
During old age they fell prey to their own deeds.

This quatrain depicts the diet standards of the haves and havenots:

I am devotedly attached with Kangri and rags,
They both defended me from cold chilly winter,
The sour juice of walnut mixed with salt is my
favourite dish,
I have no desire for sweets, sugar and cream,
Dishes prepared of sag leaves are more delicious than
honey for me.

These four verses depict the dress habits and architecture of Kashmir:

Why to be proud of this bad weather and mud,
It is not usually easy to find out a stick and grass
shoes,

As we take a step ahead, our feet do fall in thick mud,
The soul cannot attain contentment,
This carved wooden verandah shall fall in dust.
Thy devastated world can never be rehabilitated.

In this mystical poem the poet used bad weather and mud as symbols. In such surroundings a stick to walk erect is an item of necessity. On snowbound paths it was hardly possible to walk with leather shoes and so the need for shoes made of grass ropes. "Zail Dab" was the projection of engraved wood-work in a house.

In the poem "Gangul Nama" the poet, as stated earlier, described the condition of the peasantry. In the poem addressed to "Yawan Mats", he has indirectly commented upon the deceitful tactics of contemporary elite. In the poem depicting the condition of Kandi areas the poet presents a picture of their beautiful surroundings but says they are inhabited by poor people. In other poems he has directly or indirectly commented on the habits of his contemporaries.

The Sheikh was conscious of the fact that his society had the least calibre to understand and realise the contribution which he made in its evolution. He pitied his fellow countrymen who did not appreciate his role in the right perspective. He has summed up his experience in the following quatrain:

Among the rocks a fountain is lost,
Among the thieves a pious saint:
In the company of ignorant wisdom is lost,
And king swan is lost among the crows.

Reproduced below are translations of some select poems, *ghazals* and quatrains of the Sheikh.

Poems

I

The dirty scar of filth has distorted the fair complexion of
my body.
The singing bird has flown out of the limits of the garden,
The warmth of June has turned into chill cold of
December,

Each limb of body has got benumbed, paralysed,
 Each inch of my body has squeezed with decay,
 Alas! The heavy weight of sins has bent my back,
 These sweet dishes have embittered my inner being,
 I am destroyed—Alas! Whom to blame?

II

Like a king swan I attempted to soar into high heavens,
 This world made an owl of me,
 And my wings decayed like fallen autumn leaves,
 The mean shepherd boys encircled me in their grip.
 The precious gold has become inferior than broken pieces
 of glass,

Frightened now how am I to cross
 The sharp-edged thin bridge
 Under which flows
 A stream of burning flames.
 These grey hair shall fall like rotten leaves,
 The warm fire is fast changing into cold ashes,
 This tired king swan is destined to fall into a long sleep.

Ghazal

I

Mad art thou after lust and greed,
 But cool thou art like a sober merchant,
 This evil self makes you wander day and night,
 It makes you run like a puppet in its hands,
 Makes you swallow the filth and dirt.
 Alas! You have lost the sense of discretion.
 Bad smell emanates from you,
 Which pollutes your surroundings for miles together.
 Thy person has become the distillery of alcohol.
 See for thyself the dead dog has fallen in thy well,
 How can its water be purified?
 Cow's urine have you mixed with pure milk,
 Can you drink a drop out of it?
 Like a cat you are in the jaws of a tiger,
 Listen to my advice attentively,
 These (desires) have taken you completely unawares,

Spit upon thy wisdom,
Entrust thy boat to "Noah" in these cyclonic tides,
Otherwise you can't cross this deep and wide ocean.

II

Feeding of love for this world is right but alas, the death,
The bent back of the ass under heavy load is to crumble
soon.

Everlasting is thy single breath, Oh mortal being!
Why art thou deceived by the deceitful world ?

Why are you proud of this nothingness?
You are lost in effectless situation in mean gimmicks,
You enter with arrogance and leave in pride,
This is the tactic of thy false and deceitful world,
So forcefully has pride and greed overpowered you,
That like a reed flute you sound harsh voices,
This world is so cold and chill,
Don't be deceived by its deceitful environment.

On thy back is the deep dangerous ditch,
On thy front again lies most uneven surface,
The world trembles in uncertainty,
Why are you deceived by its charms?

Thy lakes are full with lotus, thy banks full with lilies,
Thy fields do smile with laughter of saffron flowers,
But alas! In the month of Poh all this is to fall in decay,
Why are you deceived by this deceitful world ?

Quatrains

Before the sunset, during the hours of day,
Do some work with devotion and sincerity,
Thou has created assets of buildings and houses,
By fighting with people around,
The bees have collected in their hives stocks of honey.
And ultimately the birds have consumed their fortune.

Doth thou clean thy dirty body?

What use are these detergents at all ?
 With this dress of Dervish and with this rosary,
 You can't find Him by deceitful means,
 Who will even see Him amidst the darkness?

Behave like a docile pet, obedient animal.
 Tread the straight path and avoid misleading curves,
 One who removes weeds from his field five times a day.
 He really will see Him everywhere and live in
contentment

"Nar" begs and "Narain" begs,
 Ishwar begs with a bowl in hand,
 The Rama of "Dandakvana" also begs,
 We poor have no hesitation to beg.

Straight I came and straight shall I go,
 My simplicity is least disturbed by any craze,
 My worth was fully known to Him then and there,
 How will He behave with His known and docile?

Just homeless and just with home,
 Just in loneliness and just in company,
 Just the mother of five Pandavas ruling the universe,
 Just she begs refuge at the hut of the village potter.

He is Himself the butcher and vends the mutton,
 He is Himself His own customer,
 He takes accounts from Himself,
 He is the mutton, He is the knife to cut it with.

One who is here adorns that domain too,
 He lives in every atom, in every particle of space,
 He ordinarily walks on foot and He is carried in
palanquins,
 He has hidden Himself in everything—look and see.

Forbearance is to face the thunder and lightning,
 Forbearance is to face darkness during midday,
 Forbearance is to lift the Himalayas in thy palm,
 Forbearance is to carry flames of fire in thy hand,
 Forbearance is to grind thyself in the grinding mill,

Forbearance is to swallow quintals of poison in a single
dose.

Who has gone and who did see Him,
Who have been devoted to achieve that,
One who keenly devotes himself to his job and duty,
He alone finds the shortcut to reach the destination.

The sour, the sweet, the bitter poison,
Who could swallow the blood of his own veins,
Who selflessly tolerated His wrath and was devoted to his
duty,
He really reaches his cherished goal.

Within a moment His grace shall make the fortune,
Thy dry branches shall blossom again,
The phoenix remained dearer to destiny,
Hence imposed self-isolation,
On the boiling point upon flames in the boiling pan,
The butchered goose shall recite His name,
How can a servant afford to ignore his master?

Fill thy bag with the commodity of love,
Thy inner nightingale shall sing hymns,
What thou art postponing do it now,
Sacrifice thy cage upon the bird in it.

Leave thy gold in the melting pan,
Upon the flames and fire of love,
Infuse in it thy unceasing breath,
Clear it from brass by applying acid to it,
And thy pure gold shall glisten with shine and lustre.

Breaking the mathematical limits
The countless adorned the infinity,
If we collectively adhere to one path,
None of us shall ever be misled.

In the following poem the poet gives a description of the eternal place of peace and tranquillity, the abode of true servants of God, the paradise, or "Jannat":

Paradise (Surgas Bar Peth)

Golden is its surface, flowers of saffron are its greenery,
Do you desire paradise, serve and do meditate,
On its outer gate stands the tree of Tuba,
It is the main entrance to the realm of pleasures,
Upon each of its leaves is engraved Kalima,
All its branches are of pure gold and white silver,
Its roots are surrounded by the source—foundation and
tranquillity,
Water of the fountain is sweet like honey, pure like
milk,
The two banks of the spring are made of jewels and
diamonds,
Its pebbles shine like precious stones,
The seats of His servants are richly decorated,
Pearls and gems are bestowed upon them.
Their profit richer, they are wise of the wisest,
They alone shall directly see
His manifestation, vision of eternal light,
They shall form a constellation around the sun.

